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Turkiye seeks ICJ punishment for Israel: Erdogan

Detailed News On Page-07

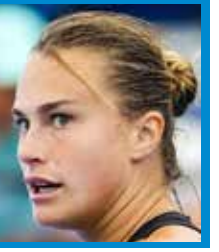
Feb 8 polls to lead to chaos in Pakistan: Abbasi

Detailed News On Page-08



Sabalenka storms into AO final

Detailed News On Page-06



Extra territorial killings

Pakistan exposes India's covert plan for terrorism

"These are killings-for-hire cases involving a sophisticated int'l set-up spread over multiple jurisdictions," foreign secy says

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has "credible evidence" for Indian agents' link to the killings of two of its citizens on Pakistani soil, Foreign Secretary SyrusQazi said Thursday, exposing the "sophisticated and sinister" Indian campaign of extra-territorial and extra-judicial killings. "These are killings-for-hire cases involving a sophisticated international set-up spread over multiple jurisdictions," Foreign Secretary SyrusQazi told reporters during a press conference in Islamabad. Qazi said that India's reckless and irresponsible act calls into question its reliability as a credible international player and its claims for enhanced global responsibilities. Already strained by historical baggage and border disputes, Islamabad and New Delhi's ties hit new lows after 2016's Kulbushan Yadav spy arrest and the 2019 revocation of Indian Il-legal Occupied Jammu and Kashmir's (IIOJK) special status. The Kashmir move, a blatant violation of international laws, froze diplomacy and choked trade between the two adjoining countries, Pakistan has, for more than four years, conditioned restoring ties with its nuclear neighbour to the restoration of IIOJK's special status. Pakistan's latest statement comes months after both Canada and the United States separately accused Indian agents of being linked to assassination attempts on their soil. However, New Delhi has rejected Ottawa's allegations and has launched an investigation into Washington's claims. Providing details of the "sophisticated and sinister" Indian campaign of killings inside Pakistan, Qazi said that the Indian agents used technology and safe havens on foreign soil to commit assassinations in Pakistan. "They recruited, financed and supported criminals,

Continued on Page 06

India's Republic Day

Kashmiris to observe Black Day today

Anti-India rallies are planned in IIOJK, AJK, Pakistan, and various world capitals

DNA

SRINAGAR: Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) and across the world are set to observe India's Republic Day, today, as a Black Day, in protest against India's persistent denial of their right to self-determination. According to Kashmir Media Service, call for the observance of the Black Day was issued by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and other Hurriyat organizations. In occupied Kashmir, the day will witness a complete strike, while anti-India demonstrations and rallies are planned in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan, and various world capitals. Jailed APHC Chairman MasarratAlam Butt and incarcerated senior leader Shabbir Ahmed Shah, both detained in Tihar jail, reiterated the call for a Black Day in every corner of the territory. APHC leaders and

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Head of Al-Jomaih Group alongwith a delegation call in Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar. - DNA

Petroleum prices likely to witness sharp increase

The expected hike in fuel prices is due to a surge in int'l oil rates

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Following back-to-back relief in fuel prices, the caretaker government is likely to increase the prices of petrol and high speed diesel (HSD) in the next fortnightly review on January 31, The News reported on Thursday. The expected hike in fuel prices is due to a surge in international oil rates amid escalating tensions in the Middle East, industry officials said on Wednesday. The government, which adjusts the prices of petroleum products every 15 days

Continued on Page 06

Curbing disinformation

Solangi urges media to follow Election code of conduct

Expressing regret over the speculations surrounding the elections, he affirmed that the federal government consistently asserted that the elections will take place on the 8th of February

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi has said the mainstream media should follow the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for the upcoming general elections. Addressing a seminar on Electoral Code of Conduct: Ethical Practices of Stakeholders including Media organized by Press Information Department in Islamabad today, he said the code of conduct is available in both English and Urdu languages. Expressing regret over the speculations surrounding the elections, he affirmed that the federal government consistently asserted that the elections will take place on the 8th of February. He said there is a consensus there will be a federal parliamentary democratic system in the country.

Continued on Page 06

May 9 riot cases

Imran, Qureshi to be indicted on Feb 6
Vindictive cases were filed against me," said Imran

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) will indict former premier Imran Khan and former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on February 6 in the May 9 riot cases. ATC Judge Malik Ijaz presided over the hearing of the May 9 cases lodged against PTI leaders within the confines of Rawalpindi's Adiala jail. Imran and Qureshi were produced before

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

No plan to shut down social media

It is govt policy to provide equal opportunity to every political party

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul-Haq Kakar said on Thursday that the government had no plan to suspend the social media platforms during the forthcoming elections, slated to happen on February 8. While, speaking to a private news channel, PM Kakar said, "It is the government policy to provide equal opportunity to every political party in the elections." "The people are gathering in the rallies and election campaign of the PTI. He was of the view that there seems to be no pattern that reflects that any of the political parties is being targeted.

Sh. Rashid hospitalised

His nephew said jail administration intimidated him

FAISAL SHEIKH

RAWALPINDI: Awami Muslim League (AML) chief and former interior minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed was shifted to a hospital when his health deteriorated in Adiala Jail on Thursday. Sources said he was shifted to IRC as he complained about issues in the jail. Doctors will have a detailed medical examination of the AML head. The court will also seek a detailed medical checkup report from the jail administration. Sheikh Rashid's nephew Shafique said the jail administration intimidated him through a phone call that his uncle was not feeling well and he was being shifted to RIC. On Jan 16, a court had dismissed his bail in a case relating to May 9 attacks.

Bilawal assures no revenge as Maryam wants PML-N govt

Maryam asks Lahore to throng polling stations, says only PML-N has delivered



ABID RAZA

GUJRAT: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari asserted on Thursday that he will not arrest the political opponents if voted into power. Addressing the public gathering in Gujrat, the former foreign minister said, "Lets vote for the PPP to see the collective efforts in a bid to uplift the country. If we come up with a sincere attitude, then the world will also be ready to join hands with us." He recounted that he had worked as

Continued on Page 06

Cabinet notifies troops deployment for Election

Under Article 245 of the Constitution, the army will be deployed across country

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Federal cabinet Thursday issued an official notification regarding the deployment of Pakistan Army's personnel across Pakistan to perform duties at sensitive constituencies and polling stations during the general election 2024. The official notification was issued a day after the federal cabinet approved the

Continued on Page 06

17 TTP terrorists nabbed in Karachi

NAIZR SIYAL

KARACHI: Security forces unearthed one of the largest networks of terrorists of outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in port city as intelligence agencies arrested 17 terrorists from Karachi. A large number of security forces and law enforcement agencies took part in the complicated mission and successfully arrested key terrorist commanders in the operation. TTP terrorists were planning to stage 'terrorism' in Karachi and all were wanted men in target killing and extortion crimes. The terrorists of TTP were planning terrorist activities in

Continued on Page 06

Gaza at risk of complete medical shut down amid Israeli attacks

"International humanitarian law states that all parties to the conflict must fully respect and protect the medical infrastructure," the Red Cross pointed out

NEWS DESK

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 111 on Thursday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound neighborhoods, homes and shelter centers and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. A reporter for the Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza last night and on Thursday morning, killing and injuring dozens of citizens. According to the health ministry in Gaza, one martyr was evacuated to the European Hospital in Khan Yunis after Israeli snipers opened fire at civilians in the southern area of the province. Two citizens were also killed and others were injured when the Israeli army attacked them in al-Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza. According to local sources, a citizen identified as Hosni Baraka, 45, and two children, aged 12 and 9 from the family of Sammour, were killed by the Israeli army in a street in northern Khan Yunis, while their bodies are still in the area. A civil defense crew also evacuated two martyrs and a number of wounded

Continued on Page 06

Qatar 'appalled' by Netanyahu's criticism

Netanyahu prioritizing his political career instead of saving innocent lives

FOREIGN DESK

DOHA: Qatar has condemned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent remarks on Doha's mediation role in the Gaza war, saying his comments are detrimental to mediation efforts in the besieged enclave. Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Majeed al-Ansari, made the remarks in a post on X on Thursday, after a leaked recording allegedly captured Netanyahu calling the Persian Gulf state "problematic". "We are appalled by the alleged remarks attributed to the Israeli Prime Minister in various media reports about Qatar's mediation role," Ansari said.

Continued on Page 06

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CASS seminar explores Pak 5th Gen warfare challenges

CASS hosted a seminar titled 'Mastering Narratives: Navigating disinformation and shaping perceptions for Pakistan's future'

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, hosted a seminar titled 'Mastering Narratives: Navigating Disinformation and Shaping Perceptions for Pakistan's Future' on 25 January 2024. The event discussed the challenges that Pakistan faces in the context of 5th Generation Warfare, which is characterised by the strategic use of deception and disinformation. The seminar commenced with opening remarks by Ms Nidaa Shahid, Senior Researcher at CASS, Lahore. This was followed by a keynote address by Mr Amir Jahangir, Founder and CEO of Mishaal Pakistan, who spoke about disinformation and its implications in the media age. Dr Zeeshan Zaigham, an Assistant Professor at Beaconhouse National University, shed light on the hostile narratives and per-

ception-building tactics being used against Pakistan. Ms Amber Shamsi, Director of the Centre for Excellence in Journalism, provided valuable insights for countering disinformation and guarding narratives. In his concluding remarks, Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President, CASS Lahore, acknowledged the dangers posed by disinformation and false narratives to Pakistan's international image and security. He emphasised the crucial role of media literacy, digital resilience and ethical journalism in countering disinformation. He mentioned the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Risks Report, which positions AI-generated misinformation and disinformation as the second-highest global risk at a staggering 53 percent, and stressed the need for countermeasures. In the end, he hoped for Pakistan to not only endure but triumph in this 5th Generation War. The seminar highlighted various crucial points. The speakers empha-

sised the need for a comprehensive understanding of the global information landscape and its implications. The discussion highlighted that India has been identified as the epicentre of disinformation in 2024. It was also emphasised that in this technologically-driven era, nations that empower their citizens with a robust digital presence wield the transformative power to influence the global landscape. Moreover, the need for Pakistan to comprehensively reassess its national security priorities in light of identified challenges was stressed. The emphasis was on creating a tailored strategy, leveraging Pakistan's strengths while effectively addressing vulnerabilities posed by disinformation tactics by adversaries. The seminar concluded with a unanimous call for proactive policy decisions in the face of the changing digital landscape. This merits media mastery and adaptability as Pakistan charts its course in this challenging era.



LAHORE: In the presence of Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Corps Commander Lahore Syed Amir Raza, the agreement to hand over Data Darbar Hospital to Anti-Narcotics Force is being signed.—DNA

CM condemns firing at Election Commissioner Office Turbat

QUETTA: Balochistan Caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki on Thursday condemned the firing incident at the Regional Election Commissioner Office Turbat and sought a report from the Home Department. In a statement, he said the incident of violence was reprehensible and a conspiracy to disrupt peaceful electoral process. He said the caretaker set up would ensure the provision of a peaceful and conducive environment to the people and the candidates participating in general election. Ali Mardan said the purpose of firing at the election commissioner's office was to spread fear and panic in the area.—APP

Police taking steps to control traffic rules violations

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi District Police were taking solid steps to control traffic rules violations and underage driving, said a police spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that police had intensified their ongoing campaign against underage drivers and booked 38 underage drivers during the last 24 hours. He said that police, on the directives of City Police Officer, were taking action in accordance with the law against underage drivers. The spokesman said the CPO had directed City Traffic Police, Rawalpindi.—APP

Governor SBP opens Japanese pottery exhibition

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Governor State Bank of Pakistan, Jameel Ahmed, inaugurated a special exhibition "YAKISHIME, Earth Metamorphosis-Japanese Traditional Pottery and Ceramics" at the SBP museum on Thursday. Consul General of Japan, Hattori Masaru, diplomats from different countries and renowned political and cultural personalities attended the launching ceremony of the exhibition organized by Japan Foundation in collaboration with the State Bank of Pakistan Museum. Governor SBP, Jameel Ahmed, speaking on the occasion, said that cultural exchanges and people-to-people contacts were instrumental in fostering understanding and good-will between

the nations. He said that the cultural agreement, signed in 1957 between Pakistan and Japan, has been the bedrock of bilateral relations as it laid the foundation for deepening and broadening the bilateral relations. "Programs we have undertaken jointly include performances, exhibitions, student exchange, scholarships and joint research initiatives between the two nations," he said adding that such activities played an important role in fostering cultural learning, cross-cultural relations and collaboration between the citizens. The Governor of SBP said that Pak-Japan relations spanned over decades and include cooperation across a wide range of economic, cultural and diplomatic arenas. "These relations exemplify your shared values to progress peace and mutual respect,"

he added. Over the years Pak-Japan relations have primarily focused on social and economic development and Japan is one of the major trading partners of Pakistan with an annual trade of around \$1.5 billion, Jameel Ahmed said. Japan extended assistance to Pakistan in diverse sectors including health, agriculture water supply and disaster management while Japan was also an important donor to Pakistan stepping up especially during times of national disasters, he noted. Japanese companies are an integral part of Pakistan's automobile industry with around 95 percent share in the local industry, he said and also lauded the important role of Japan in infrastructure development in Pakistan through providing funding for significant projects of high ways and electricity generation.

CEO assures positive changes in Pakistan Railways

LAHORE: Pakistan Railways' Chief Executive Officer, Amir Ali Baloch, expressed optimism about significant enhancements in train facilities. Responding to public queries on Facebook live on Thursday, Baloch highlighted ongoing efforts to address workers salaries, with plans to secure approval for a minimum wage increase. Despite rising diesel costs, he noted that fare adjustments had not been made last year, with the burden absorbed by the Railways. However, he pledged to consider fare reductions if diesel prices decrease. Baloch emphasized plans to restore closed train services gradually, with recent efforts

focused on reopening the Sibbi section. Additionally, he outlined initiatives to upgrade station washrooms and install new charging ports onboard trains. Notably, improvements to train coaches, starting with the Karachi Express, are also on the agenda, extending to the Sukkur Express and Pakistan Business Express. Highlighting a commitment to sustainability, Baloch announced plans to transition all railway stations to solar energy, with regulations in the final stages of preparation. He underscored ongoing efforts to streamline promotion processes and introduced the "Rabita" mobile application for passenger

feedback. Addressing concerns about salary delays, Baloch credited employee dedication for improvements, assuring timely gratuity payments linked to retirement dates. Despite resource constraints, he affirmed ongoing track improvement projects, promising tangible progress in the near future. Expressing confidence, he announced plans for the ML-1 project to commence within the year. The Facebook live session, which garnered over 6000 comments, showcased public engagement and highlighted the Railways' commitment to enhancing services for all passengers.—APP



IGP gives houses to families of martyred cops

DNA

LAHORE: The IGP police Wednesday gave keys of houses to family members of two cops who embraced martyrdom in the line of duty. The IGP met family members of ASI Asim Ali and Constable Muhammad Irfan at his office and gave keys of 9-marla house to family members of ASI Asim Ali Shaheed. The house location was decided by their choice in Tehsil Shahkot district Nankana and the family of Constable Muhammad Irfan has been provided with a house in Kot Radha Kishan, Kasur as per their choice. ASI Asim Ali embraced martyrdom in 2022 and Constable Muhammad Irfan in 2023. The Punjab government has also released funds for the homes. The IGP assured all possible support to the families of the martyrs during the meeting. Separately, the IGP met a delegation of hearing and speech impaired special persons at the Central Police Office. The special persons requested the IGP to issue them driving licences. The IGP directed the SSP Traffic Punjab to take instructions from the Punjab government regarding the driving licences for such special persons.

HEC chairman stresses science and technology

HYDERABAD: The Chairman of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Islamabad Dr. Muktar Ahmad highlighting the crucial role of science and technology in the progress of nations worldwide said that in order to achieve development, we have to give attention to the fields of knowledge and technology so that we can make our position better. Speaking at the 27th convocation of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro, on Thursday, he expressed concern that Muslims, who once laid the foundations of disciplines such as medicine, mathematics and

science have deviated from these paths, resulting in a loss of direction. Dr. Muktar Ahmad commended Mehran University for its numerous projects initiated by the HEC. He announced a grant of 250 million rupees for the university's solar energy project, emphasizing the need for advancements in the field of science and technology to enhance Pakistan's global standing. On this occasion, Chairman of Higher Education Commission Sindh, Dr. SM Tariq Rafiq said the students taking the degree should not forget the hard work of their parents and teachers. Setting the stage

for graduation is not a destination, it is a beginning, the journey of learning and understanding must continue. Professor Dr. Taha Hussain Ali, the Vice-Chancellor of Mehran University, highlighted the institution's commitment to producing responsible and skilled individuals for the country, adding that the University has adopted a modern curriculum according to current requirements. He said Mehran University is working with American higher education institutions, experts and the World Bank to address environmental threats and water problems being faced by the country.

Dr Nadeem bans sugary products in health ministry

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Health Dr. Nadeem Jan on Thursday announced to ban serving of sugary products in his ministry, asking other ministries to follow this after the advisory to be issued soon. He was addressing a seminar jointly organized by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, PANAH and other civil society organizations to address the issues of excessive use of sugary drinks and their fatal impact on human health. He said, "We committed to strengthen all initiatives to address health hazards associated with sweetened beverages."

The minister said that our commitment to addressing Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) was deeply embedded in our National Health Vision, which led to the development of the NCDs Action Framework. Aligned with global targets, this framework outlines our strategic actions to tackle current challenges. He said recognizing the impact of sweetened beverages on public health, the ministry was working diligently to regulate trans fatty acids to no more than two percent of the total fats in all foods. Dr. Nadeem Jan added that through collaboration with the Pakistan Standards and

Quality Control Authority, we aim to enforce front-of-pack nutrition labeling and warning signs on foods high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. He said that the ministry's partnership with the Federal Board of Revenue involves increasing excise taxes on ultra-processed foods, particularly sugary drinks. He added this fiscal measure was a vital step to discourage the consumption of unhealthy products and promote better dietary choices. The minister said, "We are committed to ensuring a healthy diet in public procurements and official meetings, setting an example for the entire nation." Pakistan

National Heart Association (PANAH), President, Major General (Retd) Masud ur Rehman Kiani said that focus should be on preventive health which was the most effective way to combat NCDs. He said that unhealthy diet was among the major risk factors to many NCDs like heart diseases, diabetes, stroke, liver and kidney diseases. He said that sweet drinks and ultra-processed foods are among the major unhealthy diets that people were consuming excessively. He said that policies to reduce the consumption of these unhealthy foods will improve public health significantly.—APP

Smog: causes implications solutions

Smog isn't just foggy air, it's rather a harmful blend of pollutants like nitrogen oxide, volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter

FIZZA SHAKIR

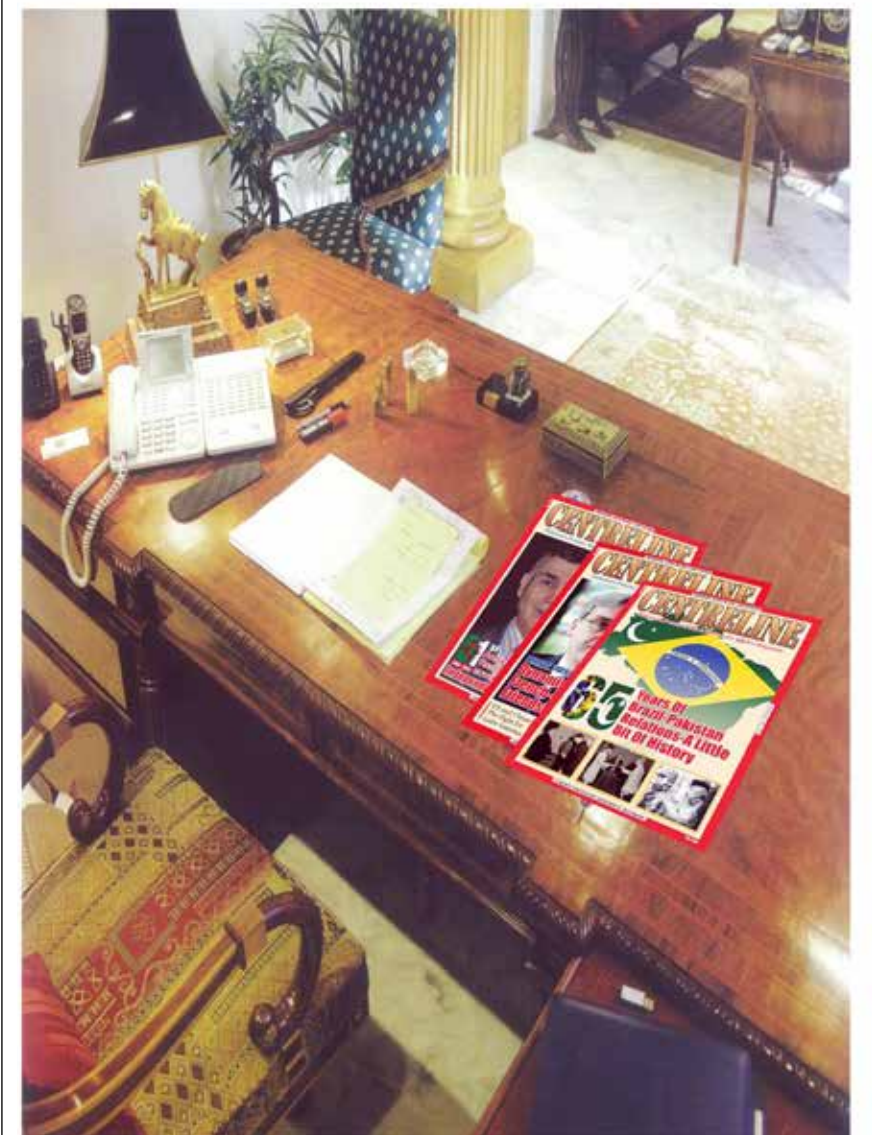
UNFORTUNATELY, Smog has become a new norm for Lahorites these days. Smog is a hazardous mix of smoke and fog that badly impacts our health and environment. Let's explore its causes, implications, and most importantly, some possible remedial measures to offset hazards of this great environmental challenge. Smog

isn't just foggy air, it's rather a harmful blend of pollutants like nitrogen oxide, volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter. These pollutants have diverse sources like vehicular emissions, industrial waste, natural calamities, smoke from brick kilns, burning of crop residue and general waste, and dust from construction sites. Deforestation and clearing of green fields for building houses and plazas are other sources of air pollution that adds to the severity of smog. This toxic cocktail of air pollutants not only poses severe health issues like exacerbating respiratory problems but also impacts the environment, and ecosystems. Lahore and its adjoining areas normally experience smog each year from November to February. The primary culprit in smog is PM2.5. It is a fine particulate matter that

infiltrates our bloodstream and causes respiratory and severe health issues. Additionally, pollutants like sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide contribute to acid rain, harming both health and soil quality. Heart attacks, strokes, and high blood pressure are among other grave health risks associated with exposure to smog. It may lead to fatal consequences sometimes. Smog is measured through the Air Quality Index (AQI). International monitors take AQI of 50 or less as normal and safe though its values below 100 are considered acceptable health wise. But Unfortunately, Lahore has recently recorded hazardous AQI levels over the last couple of months—often surpassing the safe threshold of 100. For instance, Lahore was the most polluted city in the world on 28 October 2023 with an overall Air

Quality Index reading of 368. In some parts of the city, however, the reading even crossed 400. On 18th November 2023, though Lahore recovered a bit but still recorded an AQI of 214, well above the safe limit. Similar distressing levels were seen in other cities like Delhi (340), and Karachi (239). These numbers are no doubt a great source of concern for our environment and health. On 16 December 2023, Punjab Government successfully experimented first-ever artificial rain in Lahore using cloud seeding technology, which resulted in significant improvement of Lahore's air quality. AQI level dropped from over 300 to 189. Moreover, in order to address the health risks caused by smog, Punjab Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi has announced plans to install "air filter ionisation units"

or anti smog towers in Lahore. Additionally, the Punjab Government has plans to implement a ban on combustion engine motorbikes. Only electric bikes will be allowed for purchase. Collective efforts are needed to combat smog. Measures like reducing Vehicular use, Limiting Fossil Fuel Burning, and Promoting Greenery can be some of the effective steps in this regard. Let's not ignore the severity of this very urgent environmental issue affecting our health. We should adopt a culture of carpooling, not burning garbage or fossil fuels, Planting trees and supporting green initiatives. We should wear masks and mostly stay indoors besides taking all necessary measures to clean our surroundings. Every action, no matter how small, counts in safeguarding our health and environment.



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

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

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Monal.....0334-5421812



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



Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

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



Departments

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Norway wants to enhance business ties with Pakistan

Per Albert Ilsaas, Ambassador of Norway said that his country wants to further enhance business relations with Pakistan as both countries have the potential to increase bilateral trade and do more business together. He said that supporting the business communities of both countries to engage in trade and economic relations is a key priority of his Embassy.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) led by President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari visited the residence of H.E. Per Albert Ilsaas, Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan for lunch and discussed matters to further enhance cooperation between the two countries in business and investment fields. Talking to the delegation, H.E. Per Albert Ilsaas, Ambassador of Norway said that his country wants to further enhance business relations with Pakistan as both countries have the potential to increase bilateral trade and do more business together. He said that supporting the business communities of both countries to engage in trade and economic relations is a key priority of his Embassy. He said that a Norwegian enterprise has already signed an agreement to invest in solar and hydropower generation in Pakistan. He said that Norway wants to further strengthen cooperation with Pakistan in many areas in-



cluding investment, shipping, climate change, renewable energy, and higher education. He assured that his Embassy would cooperate with the business community in taking bilateral business relations to higher levels. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that Pakistan and Norway are enjoying cordial relations that should be transformed into thriving trade and economic relations.

He said that the current level of bilateral trade is quite nominal given the actual potential of both countries. He said that Pakistan is facing energy problems and Norway should make more investments in Pakistan's renewable and hydropower sectors to generate cheap energy. He said that the Embassy should cooperate in enhancing business linkages between the two countries.

Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI highlighted the potential of cooperation in the blue economy between Pakistan and Norway that should be fully exploited. Khalid Iqbal Malik, Group Leader ICCI said that Pakistan and Norway have the potential to enhance cooperation in the tourism sector and both should accelerate efforts to realize it. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG

Pakistan said that Pakistan and Norway should cooperate in the seafood trade, IT, alternate energy, pharmaceutical sector, and others to strengthen their bilateral economic ties. Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan former President ICCI, Fiazan Shehzad, Ms. Asma Malik, Ms. Halina, and others also spoke on the occasion and gave useful suggestions to strengthen bilateral trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Norway.

Training session with regard to upcoming General Elections held

ISLAMABAD :A one day training session on code of conduct for national media with regard to upcoming General Elections was organized by Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) here at its Headquarters on Thursday. The training session was conducted by Senior Journalist Mateen Haider and was attended by APP reporters, cameramen, news editors etc. In the session, Haider briefed about the tips and code of conduct for reporters while covering the general elections. He said a reporter should always take solid notes or record the speech of the candidate running in the elections when meetings in public so that there should be no ambiguity in the statements. "Reporters should also focus on the side stories that come along in these meetings of candidates with public. The side stories should have views of public, workers, veteran leaders and security situation," he said. Haider was of the view that in becoming a star reporter, a journalist should also ask critical questions but not controversial ones. "If a re-

porter can't ask questions then he or she should stay at the news desk and not in the field. A reporter should attend press briefings of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), party leaders and politicians," he said. Haider said a reporter should ask ECP if any politician had approached them regarding any reservations. "Never ever breach the trust of the source while filing or giving news. Talk to ECP Commissioner, DGs before and after elections, try to understand what ECP shares for the elections as to have clarity in the information a reporter has to share," he said. He said media role was like a watch dog and the reporter should also know that as per ECP rules there was a limit on expenditures for candidates in elections. "Do not make sources, make friends who can provide you with beneficial information regarding elections. And if there is any doubt in the news then use the word likely in your stories," he said. Haider said media should conduct interviews of mainstream candidates and ask for critical

questions. Do not let him impose their party agendas in the interview and do not eat food in the elections which is for the workers instead keep your own things. He said a reporter must reach out to parties, public for their views on the elections and if by any chance he comes along any abusive word then it should be censored. "Do analytical interviews, reach out for foreign observers for their views and maintain neutrality and objectivity. Always take pictures which have a positive image of the activity," he said. He said if a reporter came along any news circulating on social media then deal it with caution, extreme care and verify it properly. "Do not confront law enforcement agencies and maintain a distance from them on the Election Day. Highlight things positively and take public views, dig out human interest stories, highlight tea food stalls installed at places where elections are ongoing," he said. Speaking out tips for covering general elections, Haider said never wear any shirt having logo of any political party. —APP

Election seminars help enhance PID's election awareness efforts: PIO

ISLAMABAD: Principal Information Officer (PIO), Dr. Tariq Mehmood said on Thursday that arranging a series of seminars on elections aimed to ignite a media discussion regarding the implementation of election rules and increasing public awareness about the significance of the election process. In his welcome address, at the seminar titled Electoral Code of Conduct: "Ethical Practices of Stakeholders including Media," he said PID's success relied on its dedication to kick-starting a discussion on implementing the rules of the game and exploring ways to improve the country's economy. He said PID's success was achieved when election seminars prompt a debate on election rule implementation and raise public awareness. The PIO mentioned that the Press Information Department (PID) had arranged a series of seminars covering various topics, with a focus on the upcoming general elections. PID is set to organise two additional seminars in Karachi and Lahore.—APP

Sargodha citrus fest concludes at COMSTECH

ISLAMABAD: The first-ever two-day 'Sargodha Citrus Fest' concluded at COMSTECH on Wednesday after attracting a large number of visitors. Around 45 varieties of citrus fruit and its products were showcased in the fest. It was jointly organized by the University of Sargodha and COMSTECH where the visitors enjoyed the products, especially citrus fruit-made cakes, juices, desserts, candies and green tea besides a variety of citrus fruit. The varieties of citrus fruit including Rangpur Lime, Carrizo Citrage, Gada Dahi, Rangpur, Gilgil, Mitha, Pishawari Mitha, Kinnow, Seedless Lemon, Jati Khati, Bara Masii, Ornad Blood, Mosambi, Murcott and many others were exhibited through several stalls. The citrus fest captivated the visitors especially fruit enthusiasts of all ages by the interactive exhibits. The staff of the University of Sargodha briefed the visitors about the products made from citrus fruit. Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, Coordinator General COMSTECH visited each stall in the exhibition and appreciated the exhibitors for their high quality citrus production. Prof. Choudhary said that the University of Sargodha is playing a very important role in the research and development of citrus fruit. He thanked the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sargodha for arranging this magnificent festival in Islamabad. He also appreciated the role of the University of Sargodha being played in collaboration with COMSTECH. Prof. Choudhary said that citrus is a very highly nutritional fruit. He appreciated the University of Sargodha's initiative to explore the medicinal properties of this fruit. He informed that COMSTECH has established a citrus processing unit in Nigeria. Prof. Choudhary thanked the visitors of the exhibition. Prof. Choudhary thanked the diplomatic community for patronizing COMSTECH activities and initiatives. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Sargodha Prof. Dr. Qaisar Abbas thanked the exhibitors of the festival. He said that this was the first ever citrus exhibition organized in Islamabad. Prof. Abbas said that in this exhibition 45 varieties of citrus fruit had been displayed.—DNA

Art Exhibition held at Punjab Arts Council

DNA

RAWALPINDI: A painting exhibition was organized in Punjab Arts Council in collaboration with VSCOPK. Punjab Arts Council Director General Syed Bilal Haider was the chief guest at the opening ceremony of the exhibition. More than 70 works of art of the students of twin cities were placed in the exhibition. Syed Bilal Haider also distributed certificates of appreciation to all the students who participated in the exhibition. After the exhibition, a meeting of the Board of Management was held under the chairmanship of Director General Punjab Arts Council Syed Bilal Haider. Asma Butt, Babar Niazi, Aslam Mughal, Mohammad Azim Iqbal, Director Waqar Ahmed, Deputy Director Mohammad Shakur, Assistant Director Mohammad Suleman, Internal Auditor Saqlain Mehmood, Waqar Ali participated in the meeting. The Director General Punjab Arts Council informed the members of the Board of Management about the aims and objectives. Syed Bilal Haider told the board members that Punjab Arts Council is organizing a national level drama festival, in which teams from all four provinces of Pakistan will participate.

Salman Chaudhry visits north region

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Salman Chaudhry after assuming the charge of Inspector General National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) paid a visit to North Region. According to details, the Chalk and Choband squad presented a salute to him on his visit. After which DIG North Ashfaq Ahmed briefed him on operational and administrative issues. Chaudhry said traffic discipline and enforcement of law without discrimination should be established on motorways. Strong measures should be taken to make road users' journeys safer and timely assistance must be provided to them. Good manners are the motto of Motorway Police, which all officers and employees should follow, he said. He said as many as road safety activities should be organized to make the public aware of traffic rules. Actions will be taken on a priority basis to meet departmental promotion and operational requirements, he said.

PTA raids against illegal internet service provider

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Zonal Office Faisalabad in coordination with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Circle, Faisalabad, carried out a successful raid against an illegal internet service provider in Toba Tek Singh. The service provider was operating without a valid license from PTA. During the raid, operational internet setup including allied equipment i.e switches, routers, ONT along with an illegal tower with 12 dish antennas were confiscated. During the raid, one person was apprehended by FIA on the spot and taken into custody for investigation, said a news release issued here on Thursday. The successful efforts against illegal internet service providers can be attributed to PTA's unwavering commitment, continuous monitoring and persistent efforts to curb illegal internet services. These actions are crucial in preventing tax evasion and revenue misreporting, thus curtailing loss to the national exchequer. PTA, once again urged the public to only avail telecom services from PTA licensed operators to avoid sudden discontinuation of service.—APP

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Briefs

Third party inclusion to boost CPEC benefits

ISLAMABAD: Third-party inclusion in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project (CPEC) would not only enhance the outcomes of the project in the next decade of development but would also boost socio-economic development in Pakistan and the region, said a political analyst while talking to APP. "The CPEC is an open corridor, and both Pakistan and China will welcome the inclusion of any third party in this multi-billion-dollar deal," said a Pakistani political analyst and research fellow of the China International Press Communication Center, Muhammad Zamir Assadi. The investment, he said, could either be in the form of foreign governments or foreign enterprises. "The project has transformed the socioeconomic landscape of Pakistan, and much more will be generated in the next phase," he added. It is pertinent to mention here that CPEC was launched in 2013 as a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), linking Gwadar Port with Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region with a special focus on energy, transportation, and industrial cooperation. Assadi noted, "CPEC has expanded industrial cooperation, promoted Pakistan's industries from assembling imported parts and components to localized production of parts, and encouraged various forms of Chinese enterprises to enter the Pakistan market to improve the development of energy-efficient industries in the country."—APP

Pakistan commercial center launched at ICT belt and Road Union

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Zheng Chuanjun, Deputy Secretary General of the ICT Belt and Road Union, and Ms. Ayesha Khan, representative of Lasiro Limited, signed an agreement to launch the Pakistan Commercial Center at the ICT Belt and Road Union, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Thursday. This is part of the efforts promoting high-quality economic and trade cooperation between China and Pakistan and on a wider scale. The launch of the center was witnessed by government officials, business leaders and more than 500 global entrepreneurs in the fields of digital economy and industrial investment at the 2024 Future Opportunity Investment Conference. The Pakistan Commercial Center will serve as a one-stop shop for Pakistani businesses looking to expand their reach in China by providing membership services for Pakistani enterprises in China or preparing to enter China. This includes market research, legal advice and other essential services to support businesses in their international endeavors. The Center will provide a platform for exporters, importers and investors to connect, negotiate deals and explore opportunities with the Belt and Road partners.



ISLAMABAD: Ladies taking interest in Thai flowers displayed on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day of Thailand. — DNA

Revolutionary initiatives in IT sector start bearing fruits

Compared to the previous month of November 2023, ICT services export remittances increased by US\$ 44 million in December 2023, representing a month-to-month increase of 16.99%

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunications, Dr. Umar Saif has said that the presence of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is leading to increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) and setting the pace of the country's development. Addressing a Town Hall meeting during his visit to the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA) office, Dr. Saif said, "We have achieved 13 out of 15 important targets for the promotion of the IT & Telecom sector in a short period of 5 months in the caretaker set-up. The forum of SIFC will prove to be a great support for the upcoming elected government in the process of building and developing the country, and the elected government will also reap the benefits of the measures we have taken during the caretaker period." Ms. Aysha Morani Additional Secretary MOITT, Muhammad Zohaib Khan Chairman P@SHA, Nadeem Malik, General Secretary P@SHA and representative from IT Industry attended the event. Dr. Umar Saif further said that, to facilitate IT exporters and boost exports of IT and IT-enabled services, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has increased the permissible reten-

tion limit from 35% to 50% of their export proceeds in the Exporters' Specialized Foreign Currency Accounts (ESFCAs). "We worked with the SIFC and the State Bank to make a significant policy intervention, allowing IT companies to keep 50% of their export revenue in dollars in an account in Pakistan and make their international expenses without any restrictions from this amount," he further explained. He said that with this decision, allowing the retention of 50 percent in dollars, the country's IT exports have increased by 32 percent in the last 60 days. Additionally, Dr. Umar Saif highlighted that ICT export remittances have increased by US\$ 64 million (8.99%) to US\$ 1.455 billion during July to December 2023 of FY2023-24, compared to US\$ 1.335 billion reported for the same period last year. In December 2023, he mentioned that ICT services export remittances surged to US\$ 303 million, marking a remarkable increase of 22.67% compared to US\$ 247 million in December 2022. Compared to the previous month of November 2023, ICT services export remittances increased by US\$ 44 million in December 2023, representing a month-to-

month increase of 16.99%, he added. Dr. Umar Saif highlighted that the establishment of the Telecom Tribunal fulfills a longstanding demand of the telecom sector. The specialized Tribunal will now handle telecom sector disputes and cases instead of the High Courts, aiming to expedite the resolution of legal issues and facilitate rapid progress in the telecom sector. According to the minister, the Ministry of Law will nominate the chairperson and members of the Tribunal. The Chairperson must be a Judge of the High Court or a lawyer with 15 years of experience, he said. Similarly, the Tribunal will have 2-member technocrats, whose number may be increased or decreased from time to time. The minister believes that this specialized approach will lead to faster and more efficient resolution of disputes, contributing to the overall advancement of the telecom industry. He said, "We are confident that with the presence of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), the upcoming government will also be able to make timely decisions for the country's development and public interests because we mustn't compromise on our economic stability and public in-

terests. We need to avoid departmental obstacles. Instead of unnecessary delay tactics, quick and effective decisions must be taken in the interest of the country and the nation. For this purpose, SIFC is the most effective forum." He continued, "The effective implementation of the Right of Way Policy, the Special Investment Council has removed all departmental hurdles, and all decisions in the interest of the country and the nation have been approved without delay." He mentioned that the ministry is concurrently establishing a research and development fund to support mobile phone manufacturing companies and facilitate the growth of the mobile phone manufacturing sector. Regarding the "Smartphone for All" project, he explained that in the event of failure to pay installments, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) would block the handset following the pattern of the Device Identification, Registration, and Blocking System (DIRBS). The minister said that the objective is to encourage responsible financial behavior and ensure the continued expansion of smartphone accessibility. Under this policy, he said that telecom companies will have the opportunity to directly

offer smartphones to customers through installment plans, thereby extending the advantages of mobile broadband, particularly among the low-income segments in Pakistan. Dr. Umar Saif said that Pakistan ranks as the seventh major mobile phone market globally, with 190 million mobile phones in use. He expressed the government's goal to reduce mobile phone imports by promoting the manufacturing of affordable and high-quality mobile phones within Pakistan. Dr. Umar Saif said that the first standardized quality test for the 75,000 information technology graduates will be conducted soon. He highlighted significant decisions made to revamp IT education in collaboration with various entities, including HEC, the National Computing Accreditation Council, the Examination Testing Council, the Pakistan Software Export Board, and the Pakistan Software Houses Association. Dr. Saif said students who successfully pass the test will be offered job opportunities through the Industry Placement Program. He added that funds will be allocated to support special industry courses in universities, aiming to prepare students for current industry trends and needs. —Agencies

ANF recovers 138 kg drugs in eight operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting eight operations across the country managed to recover 138 kg drugs and arrested nine accused including two women, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that 2 kg of Ice drug was recovered from a parcel at a Cargo Office in Lahore. In another operation, 1 kg of Ice was recovered from a parcel being sent to Bahrain from DHL Sadar, Peshawar. In the third operation, 50 kg hashish and 40 kg opium were recovered from the possession of two accused arrested near M-1 Motorway Islamabad. 15 kg hashish and 12 kg opium were recovered from an accused netted near Motorway Bridge Peshawar. In the fifth operation, 6 kg of weed was recovered from the possession of 2 suspects nabbed near M-9, Jamsoro Toll Plaza. ANF team recovered 6 kg hashish from three accused including two women arrested near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza G.T Road Attock. In the seventh operation, four kg of hashish was recovered from Kohat and in the eighth operation, 1 kg of heroin was recovered from the possession of an accused near Sher Shah Toll Plaza.—APP

Roadshow for Pak 300MW floating solar plants on Jan 29

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will hold a roadshow in Bangkok on January 29 to attract investment for the 300-megawatt floating solar plants project to be executed at the Tarbela-Barotha Complex sites. Under the project, Pakistan aims to develop two 150-MW AC floating solar plants, the Pakistan Embassy in Thailand said on its X account, inviting potential bidders to participate in the roadshow. The interested parties can submit international competitive bidding with two envelopes for technical and financial proposals. The embassy said the project sites were within the Tarbela-Barotha Complex, owned by the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), a highly secure area with controlled access. The environmental and social impacts of the floating solar plants have already been studied.

APHC calls for int'l probe into Handwara killings

ISLAMABAD: The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and affiliated leaders have extended heartfelt tributes to the victims of the Handwara and other massacres, mostly carried out by Indian forces in the month of January in occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK). According to Kashmir Media Service, on the 34th anniversary of the Handwara massacre, the APHC spokesperson issued a statement in Srinagar, recounting the tragic events of that day. The spokesman highlighted that on this day, Indian occupational forces fired indiscriminately on participants of a peaceful procession in Handwara who were advocating their right to self-determination. On January 25, 1990, at least 21 unarmed Kashmiris were martyred by Indian troops in north Kashmir's Handwara town. A few days earlier, on January 21, 1990, over 50 innocent people were martyred and hundreds were injured when

the troops opened indiscriminate fire on peaceful protesters in the Gaw Kadal area of Srinagar. APHC leaders Shahid Saleem, Farooq Ahmed, Adv. Arshad Iqbal, and human rights activist Ahsan Untoo, while commemorating the victims of the January massacres, appealed to the international community, especially the United Nations, to exert pressure on India to conduct thorough investigations into these massacres and other innocent killings. The January massacres mentioned include the tragic events of January 21, 1990, where at least fifty people were killed during a peaceful procession at Basant Bagh, Srinagar. On January 25, 1990, 17 people were ruthlessly murdered in Handwara when BSF troops opened fire on peaceful protesters. Another massacre occurred on January 27, 1994, in Kupwara, resulting in the deaths of twenty-seven people and injuries to 36.—APP

Aflatoxin control is the key to boosting Pak agri exports

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: PR&P, PARC, A significant dialogue on regulatory harmonization in Pakistan for Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) and Bio-pesticides was held, aiming to improve food safety standards in the country. The event brought together four major partners, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI), Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC), and representatives from the private sector specially Rafhan Maize Product Co. Ltd. The primary focus of the dialogue was to facilitate the availability and regulation for Aflatoxin biological control technology for maize, which had demonstrated promising results in field trials. Addressing the dialogue, Dr. Kauser Abdulla



Malik, the esteemed chief guest, emphasized the significance of aflatoxin control in enhancing Pakistan's agricultural exports. He commended the collaborative efforts of CABI, USDA and PARC in this domain, recognizing their dedication to ensuring food safety. Dr. Kauser further highlighted the importance of exploring innovative techniques to minimize the reliance on nitro-based fertilizers, alongside promoting the use of organic fertilizers,

in response to the challenges posed by climate change. He acknowledged the Ministry's development of the National Agricultural Biotechnology Policy and extended his appreciation to PARC, USDA, CABI, and the private sector for their instrumental contributions to the success of the dialogue. He also acknowledged the active participation of media personnel, recognizing their valuable engagement in disseminating information related to this crucial

topic. In his concluding remarks, Dr. Ghulam Muhammad Ali, Chairman, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC), emphasized the significance of Aflatoxin Control in both bolstering export potential and safeguarding the nation's public health. He underscored the ongoing efforts of PARC scientists in developing biological control methods for Aflatoxin in various crops such as Chillies, Maize, Rice, and Ground nuts.

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Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

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



Shame on those weaponizing human rights

THE mudslinging at China's "human rights record" in the quinquennial review by the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva exposes the extent to which the United States-led clique is willing to weaponize human rights. The silence of some of the about 40 developed countries keep over the ongoing human rights violations in the Gaza Strip only serves to show the double standard they employ in criticizing what they allege are China's "human rights violations" in Xinjiang, Xizang and Hong Kong. Some tried to attribute the more than 120 countries that spoke highly of China's efforts to uphold human rights in the three regions to a successful public relations effort by Beijing. That only serves to show the way in which the US-led clique politicizes human rights as part of its arsenal, with their championing of subjective human rights being used as a means to put pressure on and even overthrow foreign governments. As for the so-called human rights issues related to Xinjiang, Xizang and Hong Kong, had the "prescriptions" for these regions put forward by these developed countries been faithfully adopted by the Chinese government, the consequences would have resulted in a nightmare, not just for the three regions themselves but also the rest of the world. Xinjiang would have become a hotbed for terrorism and extremism thanks to the "Holy War" the de facto US pawns have been tirelessly trying to start in it. Xizang would have reverted to a feudal society to maintain its "purity". Hong Kong would have become a springboard for anti-China forces worldwide to cause trouble, winding the clock back to a quasi-colonial age for Hong Kong residents. And all of them would have been severed from their motherland. Respect for a country's sovereignty and territorial integrity is the foundation of modern international order and a prerequisite for international relations. The baseless attacks on China's human rights record in the regions by the members of the US-led clique were intended to smear the country's human rights efforts with the aim of retaining the "moral high ground" for their championing of "universal values". The 100-some "performers" staging "protests" outside of the UN human rights headquarters belied the moral superiority claimed by these China-bashing headquarters as they are all agents of groups on the US payroll. Shame on these human rights lecturers and champions pretending to be blind to or endorsing the human rights crises their gang leader has caused, directly and indirectly, worldwide. By surrendering themselves to be a tool in its hands, they have demonstrated how little worth they place on mutual learning and the advancement of the global human rights cause.

Reality check for DPP authorities on Taiwan

AS Taiwan braces for a third term of pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party authorities, so too will it face the political reality of a shrinking "diplomatic" recognition. Lai Ching-te, who just won the island's local leadership election to become its next leader, has made no secret of his "Taiwan independence" stance. As deputy leader of the island's current authorities headed by Tsai Ing-wen, Lai openly said he was a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence". As Tsai's successor, Lai has pledged to preserve the "status quo" across the Taiwan Strait. But he at once showcased that persistent attempt to expand the island's so-called international space. For all the hope he would become more pragmatic on cross-Strait ties post-inauguration, there is little doubt he hopes to take advantage of the international "community of democracies" to seek a "diplomatic breakthrough" in pursuit of his cause. But as the "diplomatic" setback surrounding the loss of Nauru indicates, that path forward may prove bumpy and cost the island dearly. Should Lai and his DPP colleagues ignore the lessons from Nauru and refuse to change course, worse might be on its way. Barely two days after Lai celebrated his election win, on Jan 15, the government of Nauru declared it would cut off "diplomatic relations" with Taipei. The second day, the country's parliament passed the resolution to restore full diplomatic relations with Beijing. On Wednesday, the foreign ministers of China and Nauru signed a joint communique on restoring diplomatic relationship. Ambassadorial level diplomatic ties were restored the very same day, with the Chinese Foreign Ministry counting Nauru as the 183rd country establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing. "China and Nauru restoring diplomatic relations again demonstrated to the world that adhering to the one-China principle is an irresistible trend of history," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said. "No matter how conditions on the island change ... the international consensus supporting China to preserve its national sovereignty and territorial integrity will not change, the historical process of Taiwan's inevitable return, and China's inevitable reunification will not change." Wang also called for the "extremely small number of countries", 12 now without Nauru, to follow Nauru's example. "Diplomatic relations" with Taiwan are not only against those nations' interests as well as UN Resolution 2758, but constitute damage to Chinese national sovereignty, and therefore "will be corrected sooner or later", he said. The DPP-led Taiwan's international partnerships are set to dwindle still further in number. Reuters quoted Tuvalu's finance minister as saying his country would review "diplomatic relationship" with Taiwan after its upcoming national election. Rather than expanding the space for Taiwan's presence on the international stage, the DPP has merely put the spotlight on its efforts to undermine the postwar order and international law and add another eruptive factor to an already volatile world.

Bloomberg's misery index and PML(N)

Qamar Bashir



Notwithstanding its shortcomings, this report has indeed impacted the election campaigning for every stakeholder including PML(N), PTI and PPP, and has generated media and public discourses. The Bloomberg Economics report comes as a significant boost for PML-N, enhancing its image as a competent economic manager. It reinforces PML-N's appeal to voters seeking a party...

THE Bloomberg Economics report, lauding the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)'s economic management, especially under Ishaq Dar's tenure, comes at a critical time as Pakistan faces severe economic challenges. With the country in the throes of a financial crisis, marked by soaring inflation of 20-25% and an unemployment rate above 8%, the populace is burdened and seeking immediate relief. This backdrop has triggered a wave of extravagant election promises from various political parties, including free electricity, doubled salaries, free housing, transport, petrol, and gas. However, these promises often lack a concrete and rational economic roadmap, raising questions about their feasibility in the current economic climate. This situation positions the PML-N's acknowledgment by Bloomberg as a notable endorsement of their past economic governance, potentially influencing public perception and electoral decisions in these trying times. The report had employed a 'misery index' tailored for Pakistan, which combines unemployment and inflation rates, to evaluate economic performance. This index showed the PML-N with a score of 14.5%, indicating less economic hardship under their rule compared to Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) at 16.1% and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) at 17.2%. The scores represent averages during the periods each party has been in power since 1990, with a lower score suggesting better economic management. The "misery index" is an economic indicator created by economist Arthur Okun. One of the main advantages of the misery index is its simplicity, which makes it easy to calculate and understand. However, this simplicity also means it might not capture the full complexity of an economy's health. While the misery index provides a quick snapshot of economic conditions, it's not a comprehensive measure. Its findings can vary significantly if other factors are included, offering a more nuanced view of economic well-being. For detailed economic analysis, it's often necessary to look beyond the misery index to a broader set of economic indicators. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, this report has indeed impacted the election campaigning for every stakeholder including PML(N), PTI and PPP, and has generated media and public discourses. The Bloomberg Economics report comes as a significant boost for PML-N, enhancing

ing its image as a competent economic manager. It reinforces PML-N's appeal to voters seeking a party with a proven track record in economic governance. This development, coupled with the return of Nawaz Sharif and the diminishing influence of PTI, places PML-N in a favorable position, potentially influencing voter preference in the face of the nation's economic challenges. For the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), this report could be a hurdle. Its comparative analysis places these parties in a less favorable light in terms of economic management. This could lead to increased scrutiny of their past performance and promises for future economic policy. It has influenced the public opinion and voter behavior. In a scenario where economic management is a top voter concern, a report suggesting one party has a better track record could sway undecided voters. This might lead to a shift in the electoral battleground, with economic policy becoming a central theme of the campaigns. Since its publication, the report has become a hot topic in media discussions and public debate, potentially shaping the narrative around the elections. Almost every big and small TV channel ran stories on this, soliciting comments from the economic and financial experts. Every anchorperson of prime time talk shows mentioned it as a positive omen for PML(N). How each party responds to this report, and how they leverage or defend against it, could be crucial in the days leading up to the election potentially shaping the narrative around the elections. In light of Pakistan's dire economic situation, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) should capitalize this report by finetuning its election campaign with a focus on realistic and responsible promises. The party needs to emphasize its proven economic management skills while transparently communicating the severity of current economic challenges, including the country's high debt, inflation, and sluggish growth. The campaign should pivot towards proposing long-term, sustainable economic strategies and structural reforms, particularly in the energy sector and state-owned enterprises. Engaging economic experts and emphasizing the development of robust social safety nets to protect vulnerable populations will be crucial. Additionally, a focus on improving international relations

and trade to attract foreign investment and bolster foreign exchange reserves is vital. By adopting this multifaceted approach, PML-N can position itself as a party capable of guiding Pakistan through these challenging times while retaining public trust and support. Rival political parties in Pakistan, in response to the Bloomberg report favoring PML-N, can craft a cohesive counter-strategy by critically analyzing and questioning the report's methodology and relevance to current economic challenges. They should highlight the pressing issues of high debt, inflation, and unemployment, and present comprehensive, forward-looking economic recovery plans that prioritize transparency and accountability. Emphasizing on addressing immediate public concerns, such as rising living costs and job scarcity, through grassroots campaigning and effective use of media and public debates, can resonate more with voters. Additionally, focusing on diverse governance aspects like social development and foreign policy, and leveraging social media for wider outreach, especially among the youth, can strengthen their position. Forming coalitions and alliances can also offer a united and formidable alternative to PML-N, emphasizing current solutions over past achievements. Amidst the political maneuvering following the Bloomberg Economics report, Pakistan's stark economic realities remain unchanged and pressing. Political parties, while vying for public favor, must ground their promises in these realities: the daunting \$126 billion national debt with a \$25 billion repayment due in 2023-24, meager reserves of about \$8.8 billion, and significant circular debts in electricity and gas sectors. Additionally, they must consider the soaring inflation rate at 25%, the substantial depreciation of the Pakistani rupee, critically low foreign exchange reserves bolstered by external deposits, a tepid GDP growth rate of 1.7%, barely surpassing the population growth rate, and a worrying 8% unemployment rate. In this challenging economic landscape, electoral promises need to be carefully calibrated and responsibly aligned with the nation's fiscal and economic capacity.

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

The enigma of China's global role

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



China's foreign policy has also become more ambitious under Xi Jinping. The country's growing belligerence marks a break with its earlier passivity, shaped by Deng Xiaoping's proverb "Hide your strength, seize your time". The military build-up in particular, shows that China is pursuing a long-term plan. Deng advised other Chinese leaders to wait and see in the 1990s, the country was impoverished with a weak economy. This economy has grown by 800% and now has a large population

CHINA'S rise as a global superpower has been accompanied by a perceived sense of ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding its foreign policy strategy. China has articulated its foreign policy objectives through official channels its actual intentions and methods have been subject to speculation and debate among policymakers and scholars. This has led to concerns about China's long-term goals and the potential implications for global security and stability. The elusive nature of China's strategy can be attributed to several factors, including the country's historical and cultural context, its complex domestic politics, and its rapidly evolving economic and military power. China's emphasis on non-interference and sovereignty combined with its assertive actions in the South China Sea and elsewhere, has created a paradoxical image of a country that is simultaneously defensive and expansionist. Economic development: China has been pursuing a policy of economic growth and modernization for several decades, and this remains a key component of its strategy. The country has become a major player in the global economy, with a focus on exports, foreign investment, and technology development. China is also working to modernize its military, investing heavily in new technologies and capabilities such as cyber warfare, space technology, and artificial intelligence. This is seen as part of China's broader effort to assert itself as a major global power. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a massive infrastructure development project that aims to connect China with countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure. The BRI is seen as a way for China to extend its economic and political influence beyond its borders. China is also engaged in a range of diplomatic efforts, including building alliances and partnerships with other countries, promoting its own version of international law and order, and using soft power to influence public opinion and perceptions of China. China's strategy is also shaped by its Communist ideology and its view of itself as a major power with a distinct political and cultural identity. This is reflected in China's domestic policies, such as its strict controls on the media and the internet, as well as its efforts to promote its own version of international human rights and democracy. China's foreign policy has also become more ambitious under Xi Jinping. The country's growing belligerence marks a break with its earlier passivity, shaped by Deng Xiaoping's proverb "Hide your strength, seize your time". The military build-up in particular, shows that China is pursuing a long-term plan. Deng advised other Chinese leaders to wait and see in the 1990s, the country was impoverished with a weak economy. This economy has grown by 800% and now has a large population. China has bided its time and expanded its power, and today it has aspired to a broader regional and global role, as do all great powers with escalation of wealth and power. Since 1945, the great states that have risen to prosperity and prominence have been

Washington's closest allies, if not quasi-protectors: Germany, Japan, and South Korea. A typically disruptive feature of international politics the rise of new powers was therefore unusually benign for the United States. Not only is the People's Republic of China much larger than the rising powers of its predecessors it has always been outside the US alliance structure and sphere of influence. American foreign policy from both parties has become adapted to a world in which America is the undisputed leader. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright has explained "We are America; we are the indispensable nation," she said. "We stand tall and look further into the future than other countries." In 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed in a statement that would surely infuriate any Chinese citizen that the United States and its allies needed to put China "in its rightful place." China's sin, according to Pompeo, is that it spends more on its military than it needs on its defenses. The same, of course, applies to the United States and France, Russia, Great Britain and other large countries. In fact, a useful definition of a great power is a country that cares about more than its own immediate security. The political climate in Washington always pushes policymakers to be "hard" rather than "soft" a dangerous way of conducting international affairs. The real question is, can they be smart instead of stupid? America's new hawkish consensus on China is awkward, without any discussion of how its target will respond. Beijing has its own hawks who have warned for years that the US wants to hold China down and even seek regime change in Beijing. More importantly, the Trump administration's stance has validated these voices, giving them the leverage to encourage the very kind of aggressive and destabilizing behavior in China that US policy seeks to prevent. This dynamic, with each side arm reinforcing the other, increases tension and increases the risk of collision. It's important to note that Trump's tough tactics have achieved none of his goals from closing the US trade deficit to winning Beijing's support in dealing with North Korea and Iran. In the result China is being more aggressive on the outside and more repressive at home. American determination is rooted in the fear that China might one day take over the entire world. This is a dangerous fear because in the history, when a prominent power perceives that it is losing ground, it often anticipates and exploits the "window of danger" that its rise does not fall. It was this kind of rationality that drove European politicians to war in 1914. During its rise Washington neither succeeded in conquering the world, the Soviet Union, Japan or Afghanistan despite of some horrible events. On the other hand, China with all its successes and strengths is facing of internal challenges from a shrinking population to a mountain of debt. The Communist Party also faces an uncertain political future. Despite a decade of political repression on the mainland, it is true that the rise of the middle class is fueling aspirations. Most importantly, China's rise has unsettled nearly all of

its neighbors, from Japan to India to Australia. Xi's foreign policy has dramatically increased these countries' fears, prompting many of them to fundamentally reconsider their foreign policies. Ever since the June 2020 border skirmish that left dozens dead, India appears to be pursuing a long-term strategy to balance China. Despite its heavy reliance on the Chinese market, Australia now views China as its main adversary, particularly given Beijing's many cyberattacks on Australian targets, and has called for a global probe into how Beijing mishandled the first Covid-19 outbreak. Japan revived the Trans-Pacific Partnership, bringing other countries on board and ensuring implementation of the agreement. Even Vietnam, wary of its larger neighbor, has embarked on what was once unthinkable: if not an alliance but a military partnership with its old enemy the United States. Taiwan's people have re-elected an anti-China president and are turning more hostile to the mainland, making military options more difficult and expensive for Beijing. China's greatest geostrategic weakness has always been its abundance of neighboring countries who oppose his rise. Far from addressing this deficiency, Xi's policies have exacerbated it. China is emerging today but embedded in a vast continent with hostile neighbors who are becoming more hostile. China has been pursuing a strategy of economic expansion to become a global economic power. Its emphasis on infrastructure development, technological advancement, and industrial upgrading has enabled it to achieve impressive economic growth over the past few decades. The outcome of this strategy is that China has become the world's second-largest economy, and its economic influence is felt globally. China has been actively promoting its cultural and political values through soft power projection. Its focus on cultural diplomacy, education, and media has helped to increase its influence in the world. The outcome of this strategy is that China is increasingly seen as a global leader in certain areas, such as climate change, technology, and development. China has been increasing its military capabilities in recent years, including the modernization of its armed forces and the expansion of its naval presence. The outcome of this strategy is that China is becoming a more assertive player in regional and global security issues, which has raised concerns among its neighbors and other countries. China has been expanding its geopolitical influence by developing close relationships with other countries through its Belt and Road Initiative and other economic and diplomatic initiatives. The outcome of this strategy is that China is becoming an increasingly important player in global politics, challenging the traditional dominance of Western powers. The outcome of China's elusive strategy is complex and multifaceted, and its long-term effects are difficult to predict. While China has achieved significant success in some areas, such as economic expansion and soft power projection, its increasing assertiveness and geopolitical ambitions have also raised concerns among other countries.

Briefs

Pakistan
exposes...

FROM PAGE 01
terrorists and unsuspecting civilians to play defined roles in these assassinations," he added. The foreign secy blasted Indian media and social media accounts for their quick claims and glorification of the said killings as "successful retribution against 'enemies' of India" and projecting their capacity to carry out these illegal acts. "Potential assassins were recruited, using social media, talent spotters and fake Da'esh accounts," Qazi said. He said that there was complete compartmentalisation of the various components of the operation with the employment of teams of financiers, locators, and assassins. "Elaborate exit plans were developed to obscure all potential tracks."

Kashmiris
to observe...

FROM PAGE 01
affiliated parties condemned India for a reign of terror, including widespread repression, frequent curfew and search operations, random arrests, and restrictions on businesses and social activities. They called on the people to boycott all Indian celebrations, sending a clear message that Kashmiris reject what India's illegal occupation and are determined to secure their right to self-determination. APHC leader Farida Bahenji in a statement in Srinagar expressed concern over escalating oppression in the territory. She appealed to the global community to intervene against India's atrocities and find a resolution to the Kashmir issue in accordance with UN resolutions.

Gaza at risk
of complete...

FROM PAGE 01
citizens after an Israeli warplane bombed a house belonging to the family of al-Ghoul in the densely-populated neighborhood of Tal as-Sultan in Rafah, where several displaced families also live. Israeli soldiers also stormed the apartment building of Abu Samak, kidnapped all the men and left the women and children to go to the Red Crescent headquarters in the west of Khan Yunis, while the ongoing aerial and artillery attacks on the same area claimed the lives of dozens of citizens, who are still there.

Qatar
'appalled'...

FROM PAGE 01
"If the reported remarks are found to be true, the Israeli PM would only be obstructing and undermining the mediation process, for reasons that appear to serve his political career instead of prioritizing saving innocent lives, including Israeli hostages," he added. The Qatari spokesman further expressed hope that Netanyahu decides to "operate in good faith and concentrate" on the release of the captives, "instead of concerning himself with Qatar's strategic relations with the United States." In a leaked recording from a meeting with families of captives that aired on Israel's Channel 12 news on Tuesday, Netanyahu called Qatar "problematic".

Solangi
urges...

FROM PAGE 01
He said improvement can be brought in the parliamentary system through legislation. He stressed that democratic system is for the people. The Information Minister said we have no complaints with the mainstream media. He however said that the digital frontier poses a challenge as there are certain elements within and outside the country who want instability and chaos in the country. Murtaza Solangi said the relevant departments including FIA and PTA will have to stay alert to deal with this challenge. In her remarks, Secretary Information and Broadcasting Shahera Shahid emphasized the importance of the code of conduct saying it provides the broadlines to operate. She said this also ensures the safety and security of the people.

Aryna Sabalenka storms
past Gauff into AO final

Sabalenka is also the first woman to reach back-to-back singles finals at the Australian Open since Serena Williams

SPORTS DESK

MELBOURNE: Aryna Sabalenka edged closer to defending her Australian Open crown by defeating American Coco Gauff 7-6(2) 6-4 in a sensational match on Thursday to qualify for the final where she will lock horns with Zheng Qinwen or qualifier Dayana Yastremska. According to Opta, Sabalenka has defeated the highest ranked opponent of her career in a Grand Slam event with the win over world number four Gauff. Sabalenka is also the first woman to reach back-to-back singles finals at the Australian Open since Serena Williams (2016 and 2017). In a rematch of their U.S. Open final in September, Sabalenka made a good start as she held her serve before taking advantage of two double faults by Gauff to break. However, Gauff quickly made a comeback and the pair swapped breaks again but the 19-year-old New York champion continued to struggle on her serve, allowing Sabalenka to settle down after going 6-5 behind in a frantic spell to clinch the

first set in a tiebreak. The pair went toe-to-toe until 4-4 in the second set as Sabalenka replied to Gauff's speed with power and the 25-year-old second seed moved ahead with a decisive break when the teenager hit a shot long before sealing victory with two massive serves. "She's an incredible player. I really enjoy playing her. Win or lose, it's great matches. I really hope in the future we're going to play many more finals. Hopefully I'm going to win all of them," Sabalenka said after the match. Before the match, Sabalenka had stressed that she had been hungry for 'revenge' after defeat on Arthur Ashe, but lauded her opponent for always providing a 'great battle'. After the tie she was similarly complimentary as she wished for more encounters with the world No 4. "She's an incredible player. I really enjoy playing her," Sabalenka said in her on-court remarks. "Win or lose, it's great matches. Sabalenka will now look to become the first woman to win consecutive Australian Open titles since compatriot Victoria Azarenka in 2012 and 2013.

Namibia reach
AFCON last 16
after Mali stalemate

DNA

DOHA: Namibia qualified for the Africa Cup of Nations last 16 for the first time on Wednesday after a 0-0 draw against Group E winners Mali in San Pedro. The Brave Warriors will

1-0 in their opening game for the country's first ever AFCON win, but a 4-0 thrashing by neighbours South Africa left them needing a point from their final group match to be sure of a place in the knockout phase. Prins Tjueza nearly put Namibia ahead in the 16th minute

behind by Kazapua as Namibia held on to join their already-qualified opponents in the next round.

Winger Deon Hotto hailed his side after they made history to qualify for the knockout. "It wasn't easy. We fought until the last minute, until the final whistle. This qualification means a lot for Namibia," Orlando Pirates star Hotto said. "When we arrived at the match, we already knew we had a point and we were qualified. "But we tried to have a low (defensive) block and take advantage of a few transitions. The Mali team is very strong, especially on these sides, so we clearly played low. We contained them but we also had chances." Hotto says the side built confidence as the game went on, and they will take that into their clash with Angola.

"It was our day. As the match went on, you could see that nothing could happen to us," he said. Angola and Namibia will know each other incredibly well from recent COSAFA Cup tournaments, though they have not met since 2011, and while Angola will be favourites, Namibia coach Collin Benjamin will have a plan out them.



advance as one of the four best third-placed teams and meet Angola on Saturday for a place in the quarter-finals. Mali secured top spot in the section with five points, one ahead of South Africa and Namibia, with Tunisia eliminated following another goalless stalemate in the group's other game in Korhogo. A last-16 tie with Burkina Faso awaits Mali on January 30. Namibia stunned Tunisia

but his shot was tipped onto the post by Mali goalkeeper Djigui Diarra, who also saved the follow-up effort from Peter Shalulile. Fousseni Diabate's stinging strike forced a good stop from Namibia's Lloyd Kazapua, with Lassine Sinayoko - who scored against South Africa and Tunisia - then heading wide from close range. In a game of few clear chances, Amadou Dante's late-free kick was turned

Zimbabwe
Cricket bans
2 players
over drug use

HARARE: Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) banned allrounders Wessly Madhevere and Brandon Mavuta on Thursday over the use of recreational drug use. Madhevere and Mavuta will also be fined 50% of their salaries for the next three months, starting immediately from January 2024. "The two received the sanction after admitting - when they appeared for a disciplinary hearing last Wednesday - to charges of breaching the ZC Employment Code of Conduct that arose when they tested positive for a banned recreational drug during an in-house doping test in December," the board said in a statement.

The statement also shed light on the rehabilitation of both players under the medical panel of Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC). "As they undergo rehabilitation overseen by ZC medical personnel, they have also been ordered to train under ZC's High-Performance programme." "ZC has zero tolerance towards drugs and drug taking and, in imposing the sanctions, the Disciplinary Committee considered that drug taking was a serious offence and that the breach by the two players had brought the organisation and the game of cricket into disrepute," the statement said. - Agencies

Virat Kohli named
ICC Men's ODI
cricketer of the year

NEW DELHI: Indian batting maestro Virat Kohli has been awarded the ICC Men's ODI Cricketer of the Year for 2023 in recognition of his outstanding performance in the 50-over format. The 35-year-old secured the award for the fourth time, breaking the previous tie with former South African captain Ab de Villiers, who had won it thrice. Kohli had an exceptional year with the bat, particularly excelling in the home World Cup, where his contributions significantly contributed to India's journey to the final.



In 27 matches, he accumulated a total of 1377 runs, also showcasing his versatility by taking a wicket and making 27 catches. Building on his comeback in 2022, Kohli had a remarkable 2023, reaching peak form in ODIs and culminating in a Player of the Tournament performance at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup. During the World Cup, he consistently scored at least a half-century in nine out of 11 innings, setting a new record with 765 runs - the highest ever by an individual batter in a men's Cricket World Cup, surpassing Sachin Tendulkar's previous record in 2003. Kohli concluded the tournament with an average of 95.62 and a strike rate of 90.31, including three centuries, one of which came in the crucial semi-final against New Zealand. This century marked his 50th in ODIs, making him the leading century-scorer in the format's history. Despite another half-century in the final, Kohli couldn't lead India to victory, and his dismissal in the final in Ahmedabad emphasized his crucial role in India's title-winning aspirations. For the year, Kohli finished with 1377 runs at an impressive average of 72.47, achieving six centuries and eight half-centuries in 24 innings. - Agencies

Cummins wins Sir
Garfield Sobers award

DUBAI: Australian captain Pat Cummins has claimed the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for the ICC Cricketer of the Year 2023 on Thursday. Cummins, who led Australia to the ICC World Test Championship and ICC World Cup 2023 triumphs, trumped teammate Travis Head, India's Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja to win the most prestigious award in cricket. The right-arm pacer had a stellar 2023 as a player and also as a captain. He finished the year with 59 wickets in 24 matches across formats and also scored 422 runs with the bat. Pat Cummins had a contrasting start to 2023 as Australia's captain as his side succumbed to defeat in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. However, Cummins-led Australia regrouped and lifted themselves to down India in the WTC Final, followed by a successful Ashes defence in England. The side once again displayed their ability to bounce back when they won nine games on a trot to lift the World Cup title after losing the first two matches of their campaign. Pat Cummins also gave notable all-round performances for Australia in each format before signing off with a 10-fer against Pakistan in the Boxing Day Test. "It's a huge honour, it's been a big year, with lots of wonderful team success, and to get this individual honour is huge," said Pat Cummins after winning the coveted award. - Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Book writer Mahnaz Benjamin presenting her book to famous Urdu poet Iftikhar Hussain Arif during her book launching ceremony titled "Khamshi Hum Kalam Hoti Hey" at Academy of latter in the Federal Capital. - Online

HBL PSL 9 supplementary draft scheduled for Jan 29

The replacement draft, which will be an online event, will see franchises name replacements for the players who are partially or fully unavailable For HBL PSL9

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

ISLAMABAD: All six franchises will take part in the supplementary and replacement draft, set to be held on Monday, January 29, for the upcoming Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9. The replacement draft, which will be an online event, will see franchises name replacements for the players who are partially or fully unavailable, which include two players each from the Gold, Silver, Diamond and Platinum categories and one from the Supplementary category. Separately, in the supplementary draft, each franchise will be allowed to add

players to their squads in the third and fourth supplementary pick rounds. The ninth edition of the HBL Pakistan Super League will be held from 17 February to 18 March 2024 in four cities - Karachi, Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi. Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium will host the first match of the tournament while the final will be staged at National Bank Stadium, Karachi. The star-studded PSL 9 Players Draft took place in December which saw all six franchises picking a mix of established and emerging cricketers to complete their respective rosters as per their pick orders in each category.



Final squads of PSL 9 teams:
Karachi Kings: Kieron Pollard, Daniel Sams, Mohammad Nawaz, Tim Siefert, James Vince, Hasan Ali, Shan Masood, Shoaib Malik, Tabraiz Shamis, Mohammad Amir Khan, Anwar Ali, Arafat Minhas, Mir Hamza, Muhammad Akhlaq, Muhammad Irfan Niazi, Sirajuddin, Saad

Baig, and Jamie Overton.
Lahore Qalandars: Fakhar Zaman, Rassie Van der Dussen, Shaheen Afridi, Sahibzada Farhan, Haris Rauf, David Wiese, Sikandar Raza, Abdullah Shafique, Zaman Khan, Imran Jr, Ahsan Hafeez Bhatti, Dan Lawrence, Mirza Tahir Baig, Rashid Khan, Syed Faridoun Mahmood, Jahannad Khan, Shai Hope, and

Kamran Ghulam.
Islamabad United: Jordan Cox, Naseem Shah, Shadab Khan, Tymal Mills, Azam Khan, Imad Wasim, Faheem Ashraf, Alex Hales, Colin Munro, Matthew Forde, Salman Ali Agha, Qasim Akram, Shahab Khan, Rumman Raees, Hunain Shah, Ubaid Shah, Shamil Hussain, and Tom Curran.
Peshawar Zalmi: Babar Azam, Noor Ahmed, Royman Powell, Asif Ali, Saim Ayub, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Naveen-ul-Haq, Aamer Jamal, Mohammad Harris, Salman Irshad, Arif Yaqoob, Umair Afridi, Daniel Mousley, Khurram Shahzad, Haaseebullah Khan, Mohammad Zeeshan, Lungi Ngidi,

and Mehran Mumtaz.
Multan Sultans: Mohammad Rizwan, David Willey, Iftikhar Ahmed, David Malan, Khushdil Shah, Usama Mir, Reeza Hendricks, Reece Topley, Abbas Afridi, Tayyab Tahir, Shahnawaz Dahani, Mohammad Ali, Usman Khan, Ihsanullah, Faisal Akram, Yasir Khan, Chris Jordan, and Aftab Ibrahim.
Quetta Gladiators: Sherfane Rutherford, Mohammad Amir, Rilee Rossouw, Mohammad Wasim Junior, Jason Roy, Wanindu Hasaranga, Mohammad Hasnain, Abrar Ahmed, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Saud Shakeel, Sajjad Ali Junior, Usman Qadir, Omaid Bin Yusuf, Will Smeed, Khawaja Nafay, Adil Naz, Akeal Hossain, and Sohail Khan.

Imran,
Qureshi
to be...

FROM PAGE 01
the court, where the former prime minister informed the judge that he was illegally arrested on May 9 from the premises of the Islamabad High Court (IHC). "Instead of giving me justice, vindictive cases were filed against me," said Imran. During the hearing, the police also submitted challans related to May 9 cases registered against the PTI leaders. The cases include the GHQ attack and vandalism of sensitive institutions. The judge extended the judicial remand of the two accused PTI leaders till February 6 and approved the challans for hearing. It also instructed that the copies of the cases be distributed to the accused at the next hearing.

Bilawal
assures no
revenge...

FROM PAGE 01
the foreign minister for the 16-month tenure. "I will confront the challenges posed by poverty, unemployment, and inflation". "I am keeping the target to release those political leaders who have been detained," he said. Bhutto-Zardari lamented that former president Asif Ali Zardari had to face jail for 10 years. He suggested the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers should use their right to vote in an "organised strategy." Bhutto-Zardari urged the masses to vote for his party to see the promises fulfilled. Asserting to establish free health institutions in every district of Punjab, Bhutto-Zardari said, "If the masses will give us the opportunity, we will also develop the hospital in Raiwind."

Cabinet
notifies
troops...

FROM PAGE 01
deployment of the Pakistan Army and Civil armed officials for security during the upcoming general election. "Under Article 245 of the Constitution, the army will be deployed across the country," the notification stated. The notification further stated that the military personnel - deployed outside sensitive polling stations from Feb 05 till Feb 10 - will serve as a quick response force. The notification mentioned that the deployment of Army personnel will play a major role in the transparent and peaceful polling process. The notification further added that the Civil Armed Forces will also be stationed at the Printing Corporation of Pakistan and the Pakistan Post Foundation.

Petroleum
prices likely
to witness...

FROM PAGE 01
based on the recommendations of the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority, is likely to raise the price of petrol and diesel by Rs7 per litre each on January 31, 2024, an official told The News. The expected hike in the prices of petroleum products would come after domestic prices remained stable or witnessed a decrease since November 01, 2023. "The situation is most likely to be different this time after petroleum prices saw some reduction in the last three months," an oil sector official said as he pointed out that global prices of petroleum products went up in the last one week after a crisis in the Middle East, especially the Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea, triggering the strike from US and UK against them in Yemen.

17 TTP
terrorists...

FROM PAGE 01
Karachi, but the intelligence agencies took timely action and foiled their ambitions and arrested them from Karachi. In the operation of the security forces, 17 terrorists including the main terrorist commander were arrested. These terrorists were organized as seminar students from Afghanistan under the auspices of the TTP leadership and involved in sectarian, ethnic, target killing of politicians and attacks on law enforcement agencies in Karachi.

Briefs

Pakistan, Switzerland agree to continue bilateral ties

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Switzerland affirming the value of Bilateral Political Consultations in strengthening bilateral relations, agreed to continue cooperation in all matters of mutual interest. The bilateral ties were discussed during the 12th Round of Pakistan-Switzerland Bilateral Political Consultations held in Berne on Wednesday, according to a Foreign Office statement. Additional Foreign Secretary (Europe), Ambassador Shafiqat Ali Khan, led the Pakistan side, while the Swiss side was headed by Ambassador Heinrich Schellenberg, Assistant Secretary of State for Asia and Pacific, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The two sides discussed all aspects of bilateral political relations and cooperation in trade and investment, security, and migration. Regional dynamics and multilateral issues were also discussed. In Berne, the Additional Foreign Secretary also called on the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Ambassador Alexandre Fasel and exchanged views on further strengthening Pakistan-Switzerland bilateral relations including in the areas of climate change, human rights, and development cooperation. —APP

N. Korea fires several cruise missiles: Seoul

SEOUL: North Korea fired several cruise missiles towards the Yellow Sea on Wednesday, Seoul's military said, the latest in a series of tension-raising moves by the nuclear-armed state. Hours later, North Korea appeared to confirm the firing, saying it had carried out its first test of a new generation of strategic cruise missiles it is developing, the Puhwasal-3-31. Pyongyang has accelerated weapons testing in the new year, including tests of what it called an "underwater nuclear weapon system" and a solid-fuelled hypersonic ballistic missile. "Our military detected several cruise missiles launched by North Korea towards the Yellow Sea at around 7:00 am today," the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. Unlike their ballistic counterparts, the testing of cruise missiles is not banned under current UN sanctions against Pyongyang. Cruise missiles tend to be jet-propelled and fly at a lower altitude than more sophisticated ballistic missiles, making them harder to detect and intercept. North Korea insisted Thursday the test the previous day was "a process of constant updating of the weapon system and a regular and obligatory activity," the state news agency KCNA said. It did not specify how many missiles were fired. —APP

Colombia declares emergency over raging forest fires

BOGOTÁ: Colombia has declared a state of emergency in two regions as dozens of forest fires burned wide swathes of the country and left the capital choking on smoke during record temperatures linked with the El Niño weather phenomenon. Colombia has already extinguished hundreds of fires this month, but 25 continue to burn, according to data from the National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD) on Wednesday. In the departments of Santander and Cundinamarca — where the capital Bogotá is located — the fires have consumed about 600 hectares (1,483 acres) of forest and states of emergency were declared. The emergency measures free up funds to "quickly address the negative impact on the department's natural resources," said Cundinamarca Governor Jorge Emilio Rey. More than half of the country's municipalities have been put on "red alert" over the threat of the fires, with the areas around the capital hit hard. White columns of smoke billowed from the mountains surrounding Bogotá on Wednesday. —APP

Pakistan urges UN to help protect Islamic sites in India

"The developments over the past 31 years, culminating in the recent consecration ceremony, are indicative of a disturbing rise in Hindu majoritarianism in India," Ambassador Akram said in his letter to the UNAOC head

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Reiterating its condemnation of the recent consecration of 'Ram Temple' on the demolished Babri Mosque's site, Pakistan has urged the top official for the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) to play his part for the protection of Islamic sites in India, Ambassador Munir Akram told an OIC Ambassadorial meeting Wednesday. At the meeting held at UN headquarters in New York, the

Pakistani envoy shared with OIC colleagues a letter he addressed to the UNAOC High Representative, Miguel Angel Moratinos, in which he said that the event in Ayodhya marked a "disturbing rise in Hindu majoritarianism in India", according to a Pakistan Mission press release. "The developments over the past 31 years, culminating in the recent consecration ceremony, are indicative of a disturbing rise in Hindu majoritarianism in India," Ambassador Akram said in his letter to the UNAOC head.

"This trend poses a significant threat to the social, economic, and political well-being of Indian Muslims, as well as to the harmony and peace in the region. The letter he shared with OIC Ambassadors also said: "Regrettably, this is not an isolated incident, as other mosques, including the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi and the Shahi Eidgah Mosque in Mathura, face similar threats of desecration and destruction. The statements of some Chief Ministers of Indian states have linked such actions

to territorial claims against Pakistan. "I am writing to seek your urgent intervention for the protection of religious sites in India. Under your esteemed leadership, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations must play a crucial role in safeguarding Islamic heritage sites and securing the rights of religious and cultural minorities in India. "The Secretary-General has entrusted you to implement the action plan for the protection of religious sites. We urge you to expedite efforts to implement

the action plan and ensure the safeguarding of religious sites in India". The OIC Ambassadors acknowledged the importance of the issue, with some envoys mentioning the attacks on mosques in some European countries. The Palestine Permanent Representative to the UN, Riyadh Mansour, drew attention to the Israeli desecration at Al-Aqsa and the demolition of mosques and churches in the occupied territories. The meeting decided to include this issue on the agenda of the next OIC ambassadorial meeting.

Turkiye adheres to Montreux Convention: FM Lavrov

WEB DESK

MOSCOW: The top Russian diplomat said Türkiye is "strictly" following the provisions of the Montreux Convention, which gives Ankara the prerogative to restrict the passage of some vessels through Turkish straits at times of conflict. "As for the Pentagon statement, as far as I understood it from your words, I haven't read it, but they said that they will try to get Türkiye to change the strait regime right now," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said. "If they want to achieve that, then our Turkish colleagues have told us multiple times that as protectors of the Montreux Convention, they will strictly follow its provisions," Lavrov told Anadolu Agency (AA) at a news conference at U.N. headquarters in New York when he was asked about the Pentagon's indication of willingness to work with Türkiye "to move away from the

state of conflict," referring to Türkiye invoking the Convention, which has been widely understood "as a desire to repeal the convention." "Well, (U.S. defense chief) Llyod Austin is back to work, right? That's why they're so active now. Well, I don't think that they will succeed," said Lavrov.

Assistant defense chief for international security affairs, Celeste Wallander, welcomed Tuesday cooperation between Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye in the Black Sea de-mining operation, and said it is "really important" not just for Ukraine but for commercial shipping and shipping in general in the Black Sea. "So, we want to work with the littoral countries of the Black Sea, including Turkey, on conditions under which we can move away from the state of conflict in which Turkey decided to — and as the kind of guardian of the Montreux Convention, invoked that provision of the Montreux Convention,"

Wallander was quoted as in a statement. Regarding the question of a possible visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Türkiye, Lavrov said Putin received an invitation from the leaders of Türkiye, North Korea and other foreign partners. This schedule is shaped by the Kremlin and his administration," he said. Meanwhile, Russia calls for emergency UN Security Council meeting over plane crash Russian has called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council Wednesday afternoon after its military plane came down near the Russian city of Belgorod, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said. "We have asked for an urgent session of the UN Security Council at 3 pm New York time (01 am PST Thursday)," Lavrov said at a news conference at UN headquarters in New York. "We very much hope that the French presidency (of the Security Council) will conscientiously fulfill its

duties and schedule such a meeting as soon as possible," Lavrov said. He said the downing of the plane was a Ukrainian "criminal act," adding: "We're trying to find out the facts right now." His remarks came after the military plane, en route to Ukraine for a prisoner exchange, was shot down by that country's armed forces in the region of Belgorod. The crash killed all 65 Ukrainian servicemen onboard, as well as six crew members and three escorts. The Russian Defence Ministry called the crash "a terrorist attack" organized to accuse Russia of killing Ukrainian servicemen and claimed Ukrainian authorities were "well aware of the planned transportation" with the purpose of further exchange Ukraine did not immediately confirm or deny it, but its military intelligence said it had no information about who was on the plane when it went down.

Ukraine demands int'l probe into Belgorod plane crash

The crew and all the passengers on the plane were killed, it said, calling it "a terrorist attack" mounted to accuse Russia of killing Ukrainian servicemen.

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Thursday that he will insist on an international investigation into the Jan. 24 plane crash in Russia's region of Belgorod that was transporting Ukrainian war prisoners for swap. In a statement on Telegram, Zelenskyy said he summoned Ukraine's military and intelligence chiefs over the incident, adding that the security service of Ukraine is investigating all the circumstances "It is obvious that the Russians are messing with the lives of Ukrainian captives, the feelings of their relatives, and the emotions of our society. All clear facts must be established... The aircraft crashed on Russian territory — beyond our control. "Facts" is the key word now," he stressed. "I have instructed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine to provide our partners with the information available to Ukraine. Our state will insist on an international investigation," he said. Russia's Defense Ministry on Wednesday accused Ukraine of shooting down a plane carrying captured Ukrainian servicemen for a prisoner exchange. There were 65 captured Ukrainian armed forces servicemen on board, six crew members of the aircraft, and three escorts. The crew and all the passengers on the plane were killed, it said, calling it "a terrorist attack" mounted to accuse Russia of killing Ukrainian servicemen. Ukrainian authorities were "well aware of the planned transportation" in advance, the ministry stressed. —DNA

30 dead in Nigeria's Plateau state attacks

MAIDUGURI: At least 30 people have been killed and several others injured in Nigeria's central Plateau state in a series of attacks around Mangu town, despite a curfew imposed by the state government, a community spokesperson said. Farmer-herder attacks and communal conflicts are rife in central Nigeria, an ethnically and religiously diverse hinterland known as the 'Middle Belt' where a circle of violence has claimed hundreds of lives in recent years. The latest violence on Wednesday came after a Christmas Day attack in the area which left at least 140 people dead. A dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed on Jan. 23. A Plateau police spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the attacks which took place over two days. The attackers targeted several villages including Kwahasalek, Kinat and Mairana, located on the borders of Mangu and Barikin Ladi local government areas, said Joseph Gwankat, head of the community group Mwaghavul Development Association (MDA). "The victims had sought refuge in the house of a community leader after earlier unrest in Mangu town. The attackers surrounded the house and killed those inside," Gwankat told Reuters by phone. In a subsequent statement, the MDA blamed the attack on herders, and questioned why troops deployed by the federal government to the area since the Christmas attacks didn't intervene to stop the violence. Survivors reported that the gunmen indiscriminately shot at people, including women and children, and set fire to houses and property. The latest attacks come amid a surge in violence in the Plateau, which has seen repeated clashes between nomadic herders and local farming communities. —Agencies

Mali gold mine collapse death tolls rises to 70

KIGALI: More than 70 people were killed after a mining tunnel collapsed in southwest Mali, an official said. The accident occurred Friday at a gold mining site in the town of Kobadani in the Kolikouro region, killing more than 70 gold miners, Karim Berthe, an official at the National Geology and Mining Directorate, told reporters in the capital Bamako. Berthe said an investigation has been launched to establish the cause of the accident. Reports said an estimated 200 gold prospectors were working in the field when the accident occurred. The mine is normally closed in the rainy season by the government due to the associated risks, local authorities said. The Mines Ministry in a statement released earlier Tuesday said "several" people were killed and "deeply regretted" the collapse. The government extended its condolences to the grieving families and people of Mali. Mali is Africa's third largest gold producer, with gold contributing about 25% to the national budget. But artisanal miners who ignore safety measures are said to be common, especially among young people in remote areas. —DNA

Tokyo stocks closed slightly higher

TOKYO: Tokyo stocks ended modestly higher on Thursday as technology issues were bought following an overnight rise in their U.S. counterparts. Japan's benchmark Nikkei stock index, the 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average, ended up 9.99 points, or 0.03 percent, from Wednesday at 36,236.47. The broader Topix index, meanwhile, finished 2.70 points, or 0.11 percent, higher at 2,531.92. Stocks fluctuated between positive and negative territory throughout the day, as advances in tech shares were weighed down by some investors locking in gains from the recent strong performance of the Japanese market. The sentiment was also dampened by growing expectations that the Bank of Japan will end its ultra-easy monetary policy in the near future, analysts said. —APP

Pakistan green lights live cattle import from Brazil

Last year, UAE tightened rules on import of meat from Pakistan over complaints of sub-standard shipments

SAO PAULO: Brazil said that it received approval this week from Pakistan to export live cattle to the South Asian country, as well as the embryos and semen of cows. Brazil's Agriculture Ministry said in a statement that it also received the green light to export young tilapia fish to the Philippines. Brazil exported a total of nearly \$489 million in live cattle last year, 154% more than in 2022. Pakistan's imports from Brazil last year amounted to \$298 million, largely from products such as fibers and textiles, the ministry said, while Philippines imported \$918 million worth, with meat proteins representing more than three-quarters. Overall, the South America nation exported almost \$340 billion of products in 2023, mainly to China, which bought nearly \$106 billion worth, according to government data earlier this month. In April last year, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) on Wednesday approved the proposed amendments in the relevant clauses of IPO-2022. Ministry of Commerce submitted a summary on amendments in the Import Policy Order-2022 with regards to the import of live animals and animal products in line with the revised conditions/guidelines by the World Organization of Animal Health (WOAH) on animal (Cattle) trade. In September 2023, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) tightened its rules on the import of meat from Pakistan after receiving complaints of sub-standard shipments from the country. The UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment said in a notification dated September 19, 2023, that it will only allow fresh or chilled meat from Pakistan that is vacuum-packed or modified-atmosphere packed and has a shelf life of 60 to 120 days from the date of slaughtering. The new restrictions apply to all other types of packaged fresh or chilled meat that are not allowed to be imported from Pakistan by sea, the notification had said. —DNA



LONDON: High Commissioner Dr Mohammad Faisal Husam Zomlot met with Ambassador of Palestine in UK Husam Zomlot. He expressed unwavering support and complete solidarity with the people of Palestine. —DNA

Turkiye seeks ICJ punishment for Israel: Erdoğan

NEWS DESK

ANKARA: Türkiye will make every effort to ensure Israel "gets appropriate punishment" in the ongoing genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Thursday. "Türkiye welcomes the case South Africa filed against Israel at the International Court of Justice to punish the genocide in Palestine and hopes this righteous case will reach a conclusion adhering to human rights," Erdoğan told South Africa President Cyril Ramaphosa in a phone call, Turkish diplomatic sources informed. The two leaders discussed Israel's attacks on Palestine, bilateral ties and global issues, the sources said. The ICJ is set to deliver its order on Friday in the genocide case against Israel. On Dec. 29, South Africa filed a lawsuit with the ICJ requesting an injunction against Israel on the

grounds that Israel's attacks on Gaza violate the U.N. Genocide Convention. South Africa is requesting that the ICJ grant interim injunctions, including that Israel immediately cease its military operations in Gaza, take reasonable measures to prevent the genocide of Palestinians, ensure that the displaced people can return to their homes and have access to humanitarian assistance, including adequate food, water, fuel and medical supplies. It also wants the court to take necessary steps to punish those involved in the genocide. Türkiye has been a staunch defender of the Palestinian cause and continues diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. Although relations with Western allies who hold a definite pro-Israel stance went into a downward spiral again, Erdoğan has since declared Israel "a terrorist state" for its indiscriminate bombing and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the "Butcher of Gaza."

Indonesia condemns Israel's deadly attack on UN facility

JAKARTA: Indonesia condemned on Thursday Israel's deadly attacks on a UN facility sheltering displaced Palestinians in southern Gaza. At least 12 people were killed and 75 others injured when Israeli forces shelled on Wednesday the Khan Younis Training Center, where thousands of people have sought shelter. "Indonesia strongly condemns Israel's attack on UN refugee facilities in Khan Younis, Gaza, that has resulted in the loss of lives," the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. "This attack adds to the list of violations of international law by Israel." Thomas White, the Gaza director of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, said the situation in Khan Younis underscored a "consistent failure" to uphold fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. The training center in Khan Younis is one of the largest UNRWA shelters. UN officials said the buildings are clearly marked and had their coordinates shared with Israeli authorities. "Persistent attacks on civilian sites in Khan Younis are utterly unacceptable and must stop immediately. People are being killed and injured. As fighting intensifies around hospitals and shelters hosting the displaced, people are trapped inside and lifesaving operations are impeded," White said in a statement. Around 1.7 million Palestinians have been displaced during the past three months of daily Israeli bombardment and many of them are sheltering inside or near UN facilities. At least 335 of them have been killed and over 1,100 others injured, according to the agency's figures. "Every measure must be taken to protect civilians. I remind all parties that protection of hospitals, clinics, medical personnel and UN premises is explicitly enshrined within international law," White said. Indonesia's statement comes after its Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi called on the UN Security Council to make no exceptions in upholding international law and demanded that Israel be held accountable if found responsible for atrocities in Gaza as "no nation is above the law." —DNA

Briefs

Ahsan dares Bilawal for Larkana-Narowal comparison

DNA

NAROWAL: PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday challenged PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to compare Narowal with Larkana and said no person in Lahore wanted to see his city turning into Karachi. Reminding Bilawal the PPP's politics revolves around Larkana, he promised to shun politics if Bilawal's hometown in Sindh was better than Narowal and advised the PPP chairman to do the same in case Narowal wins the comparison. Ahsan, who was addressing a youth convention, said Bilawal should first check his performance in Sindh before criticising PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif and his party. Urging Bilawal to avoid issuing baseless and depraved statements, the PML-N leader said the PPP had been ruling Sindh for the last 15 years, but had ruined Karachi - the largest city and economic hub of Pakistan. Karachi, once the "city of lights", was like a derelict place after the years of PPP rule, Ahsan said, adding that Shehbaz Sharif, as the Punjab chief minister, had shaped Lahore as the city of lights during the 2008-18 period. He said the PML-N was the party which gave laptops to the youth - a scheme which proved to be game changer for hundreds of thousands of individuals but criticised by the rivals who had labelled it as an attempt to woo the youngsters.

Hashmi claims police raid his house

DNA

MULTAN: Veteran politician Makhdoom Javed Hashmi claimed police barged into his house and arrested his son-in-law and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed candidate, Makhdoom Shahid Bahar Hashmi, grandson, Qasim Hashmi, and house servants late Wednesday, Geo News reported. Javed Hashmi said 20 Punjab Police officials surrounded his 'Makhdoom Kashheed' residence at 1:00am and "illegally entered without a warrant", violating the sanctity of the house. The PTI workers' convention was scheduled to be held at the residence where the raid took place, according to the senior politician. "My son-in-law Shahid Bahar Hashmi and grandson Qasim Hashmi have been taken into illegal custody," he wrote on his X account. All employees had been arrested, he added. He claimed that police entered his house by breaking the doors. Javed also apprised that PTI candidates and children of incarcerated PTI leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Meher Bano Qureshi and Zain Qureshi, also had to attend the convention.

US, Iran are dangerously close to confrontation in Middle East

US has 800 forces in Syria as part of an ongoing mission to defeat ISIS. Most US forces are stationed in what military officials call "the Eastern Syria Security Area," where the US supports the anti-regime Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in country's northeast

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The war between Israel and Hamas has already spilled over to the wider Middle East, with prospects of a confrontation between regional and world powers becoming ever more likely. Across the region, the fighting has largely been confined to tit-for-tat attacks between Iran-backed militias on one side and the US, Israel and its allies on the other. But the direct intervention of both Iran and the US in recent weeks has heightened fears that the proxy conflict between the two could turn into a direct one. So far, the US and Iran have avoided directly confronting each other. The US has attacked Iranian-backed groups in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, while Iran-linked groups have targeted American personnel in Iraq and Syria. Tehran has also struck what it said were anti-Iran groups in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan. Pakistan responded with retaliatory strikes. The Islamic Republic, which has long opposed the presence of US forces in what it considers to be its backyard, has spent the past few decades building a network of Islamist, anti-Western and anti-Israeli militias that it trains, funds and arms. Those groups have become more belligerent of late, especially Yemen's Houthi rebels, who have disrupted a vital international waterway, wreaking havoc on global trade and prompting Western states to intervene. And it has built ties with and helped fund Hamas, which launched its war on Israel on October 7. The US, having been trying to pivot away from the Middle East for years, finds itself drawn back into the region. It already had a sizeable military footprint in the region before the war, with over 30,000 troops. Since the war began,



however, Washington has significantly strengthened its military posture in the region, having moved roughly 1,200 US service members, alongside thousands of others aboard Navy carrier strike groups and a Marine Expeditionary Unit roughly 2,000 people strong. And in some places, including Iraq and Syria, the US military presence overlaps that of Iran and its allies. As tensions across the region rise, here is where Iran or its allies are present, where US forces are stationed and where both sides have conducted military operations since the start of the Israel-Hamas war: Lebanon is home to the most powerful paramilitary force in the Middle East: Iran-backed Hezbollah, one of the Islamic Republic's most effective regional proxies. The group has its main base on the Israel-Lebanon border and has been exchanging fire with Israel since the Gaza war began. The movement is close to Hamas in Gaza. While the exact size of the Shiite Islamist group's arsenal is unknown, experts have estimated it has between 150,000 and 200,000 missiles, as well as rockets and mortars. Hun-

dreds of those missiles "are of high precision and highly destructive," according to the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv. Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah claims the group has 100,000 fighters, including active soldiers and reservists. Iran is believed to be Hezbollah's main arms supplier. Tehran wields significant influence on several Shiite militias closely tied to the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). These include Kataib Hezbollah, Harakat al-Nujaba, and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada. Enter your email to sign up for CNN's "Meanwhile in the Middle East" Newsletter.

Bottom of Form: Experts say that some of the groups, like Kataib Hezbollah, are more answerable to the authorities in Tehran than to the government in Baghdad. The US Office of the Director of National Intelligence believes it has up to 10,000 members. Iraq is also home to the IRGC-founded Badr Organization as well as Asaib Ahl Al-Haq. Iran-backed groups have carried out dozens of attacks against US forces in Iraq since the Gaza war started, to which the US has retaliated with airstrikes. Over the weekend, US personnel were injured in a ballistic missile attack on Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq. It appeared to be the second time ballistic missiles were used to target US and coalition forces in the country since October 7. Until 2008, at the height of the Iraq war, the US had up to 160,000 troops in the country. Today, some 2,500 forces are deployed at several bases, including Erbil AB, Al-Asad AB, and the JOC-I (Union III) base in Baghdad. Wary of his country becoming a staging ground for a regional war, Iraq's prime minister this month said that Baghdad is seeking an exit of the US-led coalition. The US has stressed that its military is present in the country at the invitation of the government.

Cop martyred in attack on ECP office

DNA

TURBAT: With the general elections almost two weeks away, a policeman was martyred Thursday in an armed attack on the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) regional office in Turbat, Balochistan. According to police, an exchange of fire took place when the unidentified armed men attempted to enter the ECP office of the regional election commissioner in Turbat. During the encounter, a police personnel, identified as Namrooz, laid down his life in the line of duty and foiled the militants' plot. After failing to enter the ECP office, the armed men lobbed a hand grenade into the office. Fortunately, no one was injured in the explosion. Meanwhile, the unidentified armed men managed to flee from the scene unchallenged. After being informed, the police and law enforcement agencies rushed to the scene and launched investigations. The incident took place a day after Balochistan caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki visited Turbat city to review the measures being taken for the conduct of the general election in a transparent manner in the region.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Y Kistafin meets with Minister of Trade, Industry, Investment and Interior of Pakistan, Gohar Ejaz, during which the results of the 12th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission and the 3rd meeting of the Joint Working Group on Trade and Investment held on December 21, 2023 were discussed in Astana. - DNA

Shehbaz Sharif pledges agricultural loans for youth

'Foul' language embraced in Islamabad protests against Nawaz Sharif: PML-N president

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday vowed to provide agricultural loans for youth in rural areas. Addressing the public gathering in Mandi Bahauddin, the former prime minister took a dig at the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), saying, "The long march was staged against Nawaz Sharif during his tenure as the premier. The Chinese president's tour was delayed due to the PTI's protests." "Who were those people who were indulging in such tactics? The protests in Islamabad were staged, and foul language was embraced. The conspiracy against Nawaz Sharif was started after 2013," Shehbaz Sharif maintained. "One of the people said that if they come into power, they will release the political prisoners. I want to tell somebody that no one politician was detained during Nawaz Sharif's tenure," he said. He recounted the tenure of Nawaz Sharif, saying, "It was the all-out efforts of Nawaz Sharif that were putting the country on track. A number of new hospitals were established in Punjab. Nawaz Sharif had distributed the laptops to millions of students."

Feb 8 elections to lead to chaos in Pakistan: Abbasi

KHAYAM ABBASI

RAWALPINDI: Pointing towards alleged political engineering in the elections, veteran politician and former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Thursday said the general elections slated for February 8 would lead to chaos in the country. "Making an election purposeful is a job of the political leadership, as this election has become purposeless. The political, military and judicial leaderships of the country should sit together on the table and determine the way forward for the country," Abbasi said talking to media outside the anti-corruption department office in Rawalpindi. He showed up in the office for interrogation into the case pertaining to embezzlement in the Ghora Gali and Marri Road projects.

CM Naqvi chairs planning board's meeting, seeks updates on uplift projects

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi chaired eighth meeting of the Planning and Development Board in Lahore on Thursday with focus on reviewing progress on the ongoing development projects. Director General LDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa briefed the CM about the progress on the development projects. Chief secretary, chairman planning and development board and other senior officials attended the meeting. The CM directed timely completion of developments projects without comprising on

the quality of work. Naqvi was briefed that Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar will be invited for the opening of Imamia colony railway bridge project at the start of February. The meeting was told that work on Lahore Ring Road southern loop three, toll plaza, main carriageway will be completed before January 31, 2024. The CM also directed to speed up work on Lahore zoo and Safari zoo upgradation. The progress on project of Hospital Management Information system for 16 big public sector hospitals was also reviewed. Development work updates on Babu Sabu to Niazi Interchange Controlled X corridor, Faisalabad's Abdullah

Pur, Multan Shujabaad flyover, 9 bridges on Ring Road southern loop, 6 bridges and 4 under passes on Lahore Silakot motorway, renovation of Gajumatta to Kasur were discussed in the meeting. The meeting was told that the work on Services hospital surgical, admin block, basement and front side will be completed this month. Work on Mayo hospital, eye ward, children wards, Faisalabad Allied hospital, Holy family, OPD in Nishtar hospital, Iqbal Hospital Sialkot, university of Gujranwala, biogas plant in Gujjar colony will be completed in time. The CM was presented report on setting up of model e registration centers at every divisions.



DC Islamabad's authority to issue 3MPO 'temporarily restored'

Last month, Justice Babar Sattar's single bench declared DC Islamabad's authority to issue MPO "null and void"

ISLAMABAD: Quashing the order issued by its single bench last month, the Islamabad High Court has "temporarily" restored the deputy commissioner Islamabad's authority to issue the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO). Issued by a two-member bench comprising IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri on Thursday, today's verdict came after the court suspended its single bench's decision to stop DC Islamabad from issuing the MPO order, issuing a notice to the parties on the appeal of the chief commissioner and others against the decision. Following the decision, it has temporarily restored the authority of DC Islamabad taking action on their intra-court appeal for an injunction. Last month, Justice Babar Sattar's single bench declared DC Islamabad's authority to issue MPO "null and void" pertaining to the case of arresting Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Shehryar Afridi and Shandana Gulzar under the order. The chief commissioner and home secretary, after the decision, filed an intra-court appeal against the single bench's decision, on which the court issued notices to the parties. Justice Sattar's court said DC Islamabad does not have the authority to issue 3 MPOs, the authority of 3 MPOs should be vested only in the federal cabinet. The IHC then disposed of Afridi and Gulzar's petition, declaring Section 18 of the 3MPO Act, 1980 as illegal. - DNA

Pakistan-Switzerland agree to continue coop

BERN: Pakistan and Switzerland have agreed to continue cooperation in all areas of mutual interest. This came at the 12th round of Pakistan-Switzerland Bilateral Political Consultations in Bern. Additional Foreign Secretary (Europe), Ambassador Shafiq Ali Khan led the Pakistan side while the Swiss side was headed by its Assistant Secretary of State for Asia and Pacific Heinrich Schellenberg. The two sides reaffirmed the value of Bilateral Political Consultations in strengthening Pakistan-Switzerland relations. They discussed all aspects of bilateral political relations and cooperation in trade and investment, security, and migration. In Bern, the Additional Foreign Secretary also called on the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Alexandre Fasel and exchanged views on further strengthening Pakistan-Switzerland bilateral relations including in the areas of climate change, human rights, and development cooperation. - Agencies

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