



# Islamabad POST

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**UK's Prince William fills royal void**

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**Simona Halep doping ban appeal begins**

Detailed News On Page-06



## Ahead of Election 2024

# Over 26 killed in two blasts in Balochistan

Blasts target independent candidate office in Pishin, JUI-F's leader in Killa Saifullah on eve of general elections

BUREAU REPORT

QUETTA: At least 26 people were killed and 50 others injured Wednesday in two separate explosions targeting election candidates in Balochistan, just a day before general elections in Pakistan. A three-day mourning period has been announced by CM Balochistan to mourn the loss of lives in both attacks, Caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai said in a presser. The first attack claimed at least 14 people's lives while 25 were injured after an explosion took place outside an independent candidate's office in Balochistan's Pishin, while the second blast took place outside the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) office in the Killa Saifullah district. The Pishin blast took place outside the political office of independent candidate Asfand Yar Khan Kakar in Khanozai area. Kakar is contesting elections from NA-265 constituency and Balochistan Assembly constituencies - PB-47 and PB-48 in the February 8 elections. The injured people have been shifted to the Tehsil Hospital Khanozai, while the bodies have also been transferred, the hospital's MS Dr Habib told media. Dr Habib said most of the injured are in critical condition. Following the blast, an emergency has been imposed across hospitals in Quetta for which additional staff has also been called, the provincial health secretary told Geo News. He added that operation theatres with the staff are ready to treat injured at the Trauma Centre, Civil Hospital, BMC, Benazir and Sheikh Zayed Hospital. The independent candidate was not present inside his office when the explosion took place in PP-47 in Pishin. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has taken notice of the blast and summoned a report from Balochistan chief secretary and Inspector General of Police (IGP).

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## Hamdullah survives gun attack in Chaman

DNA

CHAMAN: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) leader Hafiz Hamdullah survived a gun attack on Wednesday. Police said that unidentified men opened fire on the JUI-F leader's car near the Mezaia. Hafiz Hamdullah remained safe in the attack, while the attackers fled in response to the retaliatory firing by Hafiz Hamdullah's guards. The JUI-F leader was travelling from Chaman to Quetta. Earlier, at least 24 people were killed and over 30 injured in two separate bomb blasts targeting the offices of candidates contesting the Feb 8 general elections in Pishin and Killa Saifullah districts of Balochistan on Wednesday. According to details, the terrorism act in Killa Abdullah was carried out outside an election office of Maulana Abdul Wasay, a JUI-F leader, as people had gathered on the premises for a meeting. However, Wasay, who is a JUI-F candidate from PB-3, wasn't present in the meeting when the bomb blast rocked the area, as the investigators are trying to ascertain the nature of the explosion by collecting evidence from the site.

## Gaza ceasefire deal

# Hamas proposes 3-stage plan for hostage releases

"The 1st stage of the possible Gaza deal includes the entry of no fewer than 500 aid trucks, the return of displaced people and free movement across Gaza," the source added

NEWS DESK

CAIRO: Palestinian group Hamas has proposed a 3-stage plan for a Gaza cease-fire that includes a 135-day pause in fighting in return for hostage releases, according to a Palestinian source on Wednesday. Qatar, Egypt and the US confirmed Tuesday that they have received Hamas' response to a framework agreement for a Gaza cease-fire and hostage swap with Israel. "Hamas' response includes a 3-stage plan, each lasting 45 days during which military operations would be completely halted on both sides and prisoners and remains would be exchanged." In the first stage, Hamas will release women, children, elderly and sick people held by

Continued on Page 06

## 'No diplomatic ties with Israel without Palestinian state'

FOREIGN DESK

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said there will be no diplomatic relations between the Kingdom and Israel unless Palestinians had an independent state, state news agency SPA reported early on Wednesday, citing a statement from the foreign ministry. The statement by the foreign ministry said Riyadh was steadfast on Palestinians

Continued on Page 06



BAKU: President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva and family members voted in Khankendi, during the 2024 Presidential elections. - DNA

## Border with Aighan-Iran to remain closed

Normal operations would resume on Friday, says FO spokesperson

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided to close its border with neighbouring Afghanistan and Iran for all purposes on February 8 to ensure security during the polling. The announcement about the closure of the border was made by the Foreign Office (FO) on Wednesday. "To ensure full security during the general elections to be held in Pakistan on 8 Feb 2024, border crossings with Afghanistan and Iran would remain closed both for cargo and pedestrians. Normal operations would resume on 9 Feb 2024," said a terse statement issued by FO Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch.

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## ECP postpones polling in four constituencies

DNA

LAHORE: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has postponed elections in four constituencies due to death of candidates. The constituencies where elections have been postponed include three provincial assembly seats. Elections were postponed in PK-91 (Kohat) due to death of candidate Ismatullah Khattak. In NA-08 and PK-22 (Bajaur) polling was put off due to death of aspirant Rehan Zeb. Similarly, the ECP postponed polling in PP-266 (Rahim Yar Khan) after a candidate,

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## Over 128 mln to vote

# Nation readies for decisive elections

The main purpose of the election city was to update the election results exclusively through the media wall

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Over 128 million voters set to decide fate of the nation for five years as 90,000 polling stations declared "highly sensitive" With less than a Day left, The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday established the election city ahead of the forthcoming elections, slated to happen tomorrow (February 8). The main purpose of the election city was to update the election results exclusively through the media wall. According to the details, the media wall will be helpful for media representatives and foreign observers to monitor the results exclusively. The media wall will also provide results for any constituency. Moreover, the wall will also give information if results are stopped in any of the constituencies. Meanwhile, The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) refuted on Wednesday claims circulating on social media regarding the printing and

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## ECP sets up 90,675 polling stations across country

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has established 90,675 polling stations across the country for Feb 8 polls for the 12th general election 2024. As per ECP, 25,320 polling stations for men and 23,952 for women have been established, while the total number of joint polling stations for men and women is 41,403 across the country. Punjab: According to the ECP, a total of 50,944 polling stations have been set up in Punjab. The number of polling stations for men are 14,556 and

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## Briefs

### Raof urges people to remember Khan

Calls upon citizens to use power of vote

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Central Information Secretary Raof Hasan Raof Hasan has called upon the people of the country that as the morning dawns on February 8, they should remember incarcerated PTI Chairman-for-life fighting the battle for restoring Pakistan's dignity, honour, sovereignty and ensuring welfare of its people. In a special message, PTI CIS said that PTI Founding Chairman has dedicated everything including his life for cause of restoring the country's dignity, sovereignty and ensuring public welfare.

### PML-N top leaders can't vote for 'lion'

Votes of Nawaz, Shehbaz and Hamza are registered in NA-128

DNA

LAHORE: While the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) top leaders wooing voters to stamp on the party's 'lion' electoral symbol to get rid of sky-high inflation among other issues, ironically they can't cast their votes for their party's candidate on the National Assembly seat in the tomorrow's general elections. According to a newspaper report, the party officials said the votes of Nawaz Sharif, Shehbaz Sharif and Hamza Shehbaz are registered in NA-128 where the PML-N has a seat adjustment with the Istehkam-e-Pakistan (IPP).

# Pak committed to foster democratic process: FO

Security plans have also been finalised to hold the February 8 polls as per electoral laws, says FO spokesperson

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch on Wednesday responded to the remarks made by the United Nations regarding the general elections, saying that Pakistan has finalised the security plans as per its electoral laws. A day earlier, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern over violent incidents ahead of the upcoming general elections set to take place on February 8 (today). "We deplore all acts of violence against political parties and candidates, and urge the authorities to uphold the fundamental freedoms necessary for an inclusive and meaningful democratic process," spokesperson Liz Throssell said in a statement. In her statement, the UN spokesperson underscored that "no less than 24" incidents have occurred where armed groups have targeted political parties, and called on the authorities to "ensure a fully free and fair vote and to recommit to the democratic process and an



environment that promotes and protects the full range of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights". In the UN's response, Baloch in her statement, said: "Pakistan is fully committed to fostering an inclusive democratic process, upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed in its laws and Constitution." She said that the security plans have also been finalised to hold the February 8 polls, adding that Pakistan's judicial system provides for fair trial and due process. "Domestic legal remedies are available in case of any complaints in the electoral process," said the FO spokesperson. The previous general election campaigns have witnessed spasms of violence, with scores of candidates and voters targeted by bombings and gun attacks and it seems that the 2024 polls are likely to be no different as the country has witnessed a significant surge in targeting of electioneering activities and candidates. Scores of attacks have targeted candidates and electioneering activities of several political parties including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), National Party (NP), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F),

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# CM chairs 3rd commerce coordination committee meeting

The whole Punjab Cabinet, Chief Secretary, IG Police and concerned secretaries specially participated in the meeting

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi presided over the 3rd Punjab Chambers of Commerce Coordination Committee meeting being held at CM office. The whole Punjab Cabinet, Chief Secretary, IG Police and concerned secretaries specially participated in the meeting. The participants in the Chamber of Commerce Coordination Committee accorded a standing ovation and paid tributes to the exemplary performance of CM Mohsin Naqvi adding that the credit for the establishment of 6 Business Facilitation Centres in Punjab goes to CM Mohsin Naqvi. Kashif Anwar President LCCI acknowledged that the day and night work being undertaken by the CM for the well-being of the masses has set a unique example of rendering public service. President Sargodha Chamber of Commerce and Industry Intiaz Dogar said that neither any Chief Minister has done such a huge amount of work since the inception of Pakistan nor have we seen such an amount of work being done by any other. President Federation of Pakistan Women Chambers said that Mohsin Naqvi be-

fore the completion of his tenure has set an emulating precedent for the coming government. Shamim Aftab Women Chamber Sargodha said that no caretaker government had shown such an exemplary performance as of CM Mohsin Naqvi adding that Mohsin Naqvi rendered his exemplary services with an extraordinary speed. Ansar Ali President Jhang Chamber said that we have not seen such an excellent CM in the history of Punjab. CM while addressing the meeting stated that the traders and industrialists can play a pivotal role for bringing improvements in the national economy. We would review establishing a 'Resource Centre' for the women entrepreneurs. We are going to establish Business Facilitation Centres in every division of Punjab while 6 Business Facilitation Centres have been made functional in only 45 days. Mohsin Naqvi apprised that 22 provincial departments and 2 federal departments are providing services at the Business Facilitation Centre counters. The industrialists will be provided 124 NOCs under one roof with the establishment of Business Facilitation Centres. The industrialists and presidents along

with office bearers of various chambers put forth their proposals and recommendations for the promotion of business activities across the province. CM noted down all their proposals and assured them complete implementation on their practicable recommendations. Provincial Ministers SM Tanveer, Amir Mir, Bilal Afzal, Azfar Ali Nasir, Dr. Javed Akram, Mansoor Qadir, Ibrahim Murad, Advisers Kanwar Dilshad, Wahab Riaz, Chief Secretary, IG Police, concerned secretaries, senior office bearers of the chambers of commerce participated in the meeting. Meanwhile, CM Naqvi inaugurated daycare at police lines Qila Gujjar Singh Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi inaugurated the daycare centre, set up in collaboration with the private sector, at police lines Qila Gujjar Singh and expressed satisfaction with the facilities. The CM directed to improve the conditions of police flats adjacent to the office of DIG (Investigations), emphasizing the necessity of adequate parking arrangements. He also instructed to ensure spacious and separate entryways for the residents. CCPO Bilal Siddique Kamyana, DIG (Ops) Ali Rizvi, and others were also present.



ISLAMABAD: High Commissioner of Australia Neil Hawkins called on Foreign Minister Jilil Abbas Jillani. —DNA

## Arrangements finalized for general elections: Minister

DNA

PESHAWAR : Provincial Caretaker Minister for Information, Barrister Feroze Jamal Kakakhel Wednesday said that all the necessary arrangements had been completed for general elections that was the mandate of caretaker government.

Addressing a press conference here, the minister said that control rooms had been established by election commission, home department and police to monitor the election process. He said that Quick Response Force had also been deployed to meet any emergency in an effective way.

He said that steps had been taken for security of sensitive polling station adding that about 15000 polling stations had been established among which some are declared sensitive. The minister said that strict action would be taken that were planning to challenge of state. Regretting May 9 incident, he said that youth were misguided on the day by certain elements to fulfill their nefarious designs. He said we must join hands to end mutual hatred and perception of mistrust. He said that decision had not been taken to suspend internet service however the service might be suspended in areas where needed.

## IGP visits polling station, reviews security arrangements

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI : Inspector General of Police (IGP), Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja Wednesday paid a visit to the Commerce College polling station located near PIDC. During his visit, the IGP interacted with the police personnel who were on duty at the polling station. He instructed the officers to enhance the security measures to ensure the safety of voters, candidates, polling staff, and materials by maintaining a strong police presence in and around the polling stations. Riffat Mukhtar Raja emphasized the importance of vigilance

and readiness among the police stationed at the polling stations. He stressed the need for extraordinary security measures based on past and anticipated election scenarios, with no room for any shortcomings. Riffat informed that the deployment of police personnel had been completed, and all necessary polling materials had been delivered. Ensuring safety at all levels remains a top priority, with concerted efforts aimed at conducting peaceful elections, he reiterated. Addressing the media, the IGP highlighted the shared responsibility for ensuring peaceful elections, underscoring the pivotal role of

the police in maintaining security. He assured that the police force was utilizing all available resources, including Quick Response Force (QRF), which was on standby. Additionally, district Senior Superintendents of Police (SSPs) have identified sensitive and highly sensitive polling locations, along with Designated Returning Officers (DROs), to ensure a swift response to any untoward incidents. Subsequently, the IGP visited the election control room situated in the office of DIGP South, where he received a briefing on monitoring activities from DIGP South.

## Governor urges masses to exercise right to vote

PESHAWAR : Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali has urged the masses to participate in the electoral process abiding by the norms of democracy and respecting the electoral rights of each other. In a message issued here in connection with general elections, the KP Governor also urged the masses to cooperate with the administration, police and polling staff for the peaceful conduct of the electoral process. He said that KP people had always expressed mutual respect in elections and hoped that the election would be completed in the province in an atmosphere of peace and mutual coexistence. KP Governor advised the masses to remain patient and avoid creating unnecessary rush in polling stations. He said that law enforcers are fully prepared to meet any untoward incident adding that political workers should respect the democratic rights of each other and maintain decorum and discipline during elections keeping in view the basic norms of democracy. — DNA

## 2.6 mln people to cast votes in Sargodha

SARGODHA: A total of 2,668,700 voters are set to exercise their right to vote for five National Assembly and ten Provincial Assembly seat of general election 2024 in Sargodha district. According to a spokesman for ECP office Sargodha, a total of 1,417,495 male voters and 1,251,205 female voters would cast their votes on February 08. For the general elections, a total of 1698 polling stations have been set up in Sargodha district, of which 513 are for male voters and 471 are for female voters.—APP

## Mangla dam water level in continual decline

MIRPUR : As a result of ongoing intermittent heavy snowfall on the upper reaches of the Himalayan state of Jammu and Kashmir, the country's second largest reservoir, Mangla Dam, gradually dries following a continual reduction of inflows followed by increased outflows in the reservoir, where the water level has reduced to a greater extent. The water level in Mangla dam, located in Mirpur district of AJK, was reported as 1150.30 feet on Wednesday, against the maximum conservation level of 1242 feet and the live storage capacity of 1.786 MAF in the reservoir, official sources told APP here on Wednesday. The water level in the dam is gradually reducing further, the sources said. Mangla Dam, the largest reservoir in terms of water storage in the country, was filled to its maximum conservation capacity of 1242 feet on August 17 this year as a seasonal impounding of the reservoir, official sources told the news agency. The inflows

and outflows of the Jhelum River at Mangla reservoir were recorded respectively, as 4500 and 30000 cusecs of water from the dam on Wednesday. Meanwhile, the overall position of the river inflows and outflows at Tarbela, Mangla, and Chashma, along with the reservoir levels and the barrages on Wednesday, remained as follows: Rivers: Indus at Tarbela: Inflows 13500 cusecs and Outflows 35000 cusecs; Kabul at Nowshera: Inflows 10400 cusecs and Outflows 10400 cusecs; Khairabad Bridge: Inflows 16100 cusecs and Outflow 16100, Jhelum at Mangla: Inflows 4500 cusecs and Outflows 30000 cusecs, Chenab at Marala: Inflows 7600 cusecs and Outflows 4000 cusecs. Barrages: Jinnah: Inflows 45900 cusecs and Outflows 45900 cusecs, Chashma: Inflows: 42000 cusecs and Outflows: 42000 cusecs, Tansa: Inflows 41600 cusecs and Outflows 37600 cusecs, Guddu: Inflows: 36200 cusecs and Outflows: 32800 cusecs Sukkur: Inflows: 34000 cusecs and Outflows:

15500 cusecs Kotri: Inflows 8000 cusecs and Outflows 18000 cusecs Trimmu: Inflows 12800 cusecs and Outflows 7800 cusecs, Panjnad: Inflows 6200 cusecs and Outflows 3200 cusecs. Reservoirs (Level and Storage): Tarbela: Minimum operating level: 1402 feet; present level: 1464.14 feet; maximum conservation level: 1550 feet; live storage today: 1.594 MAF. Mangla: Minimum operating level: 1050 feet; present level: 1150.30 feet; maximum conservation level: 1242 feet; live storage today: 1.786 MAF. Chashma: Minimum operating level: 638.15 feet; present level: 642.20 feet; maximum conservation level: 649 feet; live storage today: 0.062 MAF. The inflows and outflows of the River Indus at Tarbela, Jinnah, and Chashma, the River Kabul at Nowshera, and the River Jhelum at Mangla have been reflected as mean flows for 24 hours, whereas the other flows have been gauged at 6 a.m. Wednesday.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi cutting the ribbon during inauguration Election 2024 Coordination and Facilitation center at PID.—DNA

## ITU appoints Dr. Saif to Innovation board

Dr. Umar Saif is currently serving as Pakistan's caretaker federal minister for Information Technology & Telecommunication

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD :The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has appointed Dr Umar Saif, to the Digital Innovation Board of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development. The Digital Innovation Board was established to provide strategic guidance, expertise, and advocacy regarding its mission of building critical local enablers and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in digital development, to create a more inclusive and equitable digital future for all. This accomplished group brings a wealth of personal expertise, leadership, and dedication to drive forward the Alliance's collective vision of an equitable and sustainable digital future for all, said a news release issued here on Wednesday. Dr. Umar Saif is currently serving as Pakistan's caretaker federal minister for Infor-

mation Technology & Telecommunication. The alliance was set up to bridge the global digital innovation divide and to support ITU members as they work towards an equitable digital future. The Pakistan's IT & Telecom Minister joins 17 other eminent individuals, who have all been nominated in their personal capacity and based on their track record in innovation, and will provide strategic guidance, expertise and advocacy for the alliance's goals and vision. The Alliance establishes the Digital Innovation Board to provide strategic guidance, expertise, and advocacy regarding its mission of building critical local enablers and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in digital development, to create a more inclusive and equitable digital future for all. As the Alliance is accelerating innovation capacity and creating linkages at the national, regional,

and global level, the Board will advance the efforts of the Alliance at the global stage, leading the dialogue on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in digital development with relevant stakeholders and prospective partners, including UN agencies, governments, and private sector. The Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava will be one of the two Co-chairs of the Digital Innovation Board, and the second Co-chair will be nominated during the first Board Meeting. The Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development initiated by the BDT Director will build critical local enablers to lead in the changing digital environment. It will also enable BDT to develop new organizational and human excellence capabilities, deliver new products and services for ITU Membership and

strengthen the engagement of the private sector and academia in the critical work of BDT. Eighteen distinguished individuals were selected to serve as members of the Digital Innovation Board based on their expression of interest and a nomination process. The ITU is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies - ICTs. Founded in 1865 to facilitate international connectivity in communications networks, we allocate global radio spectrum and satellite orbits, develop the technical standards that ensure networks and technologies seamlessly interconnect, and strive to improve access to ICTs to underserved communities worldwide. Every time you make a phone call via the mobile, access the Internet or send an email, you are benefiting from the work of ITU.



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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### FEBRUARY

Feb 04/Sri Lanka
National Day
Feb 06/N. Zealand
National Day
Feb 06/Uganda
Army Day
Feb 11/Iran
Revolution day
Feb 16/DPR Korea
National Day
Feb 16/Lithuania
National Day
Feb 18/Gambia
National Day
Feb 19/Nepal
Democracy Day
Feb 23/Uzbekistan
National Day
Feb 23/Brunei
National Day
Feb 23/Guyana
National Day
Feb 23/Russia
National Army Day
Feb 23/Tajikistan
Armed Forces Day
Feb 25/Kuwait
National Day

## Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949
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## Emergency

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



## Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway 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
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# Mohtasib provides relief of Rs 4.898 billion: report

While briefing the President, the Federal Ombudsman highlighted the role and performance of the institution. He informed that 193,028 complaints were addressed in 2023 whereas monetary relief of Rs 4.898 billion was provided to the complainants

**FAISAL SHEIKH**

ISLAMABAD : Wafaqi Mohtasib has resolved 193,028 complaints against the maladministration of government departments and provided relief worth Rs 4.898 billion to citizens. The Mohtasib processed a record 194,099 complaints during 2023, the registration of complaints witnessed a surge of 18% while the disposal of complaints increased by 22% as compared to 2022. Furthermore, on the recommendations of Wafaqi Mohtasib, 18,000 street children were enrolled in government schools in Islamabad. This was highlighted by Wafaqi Mohtasib (Ombudsman), Mr Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi, during a briefing given to President Dr Arif Alvi, who visited

Wafaqi Mohtasib Office, in Islamabad, today. The meeting was attended by advisors to the Ombudsman and senior officials of the Mohtasib.

While briefing the President, the Federal Ombudsman highlighted the role and performance of the institution. He informed that 193,028 complaints were addressed in 2023 whereas monetary relief of Rs 4.898 billion was provided to the complainants. The meeting was told that 85.4% of Wafaqi Mohtasib's decisions were implemented last year, and efforts were underway to further improve the implementation rate. It was apprised that the greater use of technology in Mohtasib had enhanced people's accessibility as 48,190 complaints in 2023 were registered online, which was an increase of 47% from the year 2022.

Similarly, 22,321 complaints were received through Mohtasib's mobile App in 2023 with an increase of 21% as compared to 2022. The meeting was also told that under the Integrated Complaint Resolution System, 18,469 complaints were processed in 2023, whereas Mohtasib's teams had also held Khuli Katcheries, and inspection visits to address people's grievances against government agencies. It was added that 2,113 cases were disposed of through the Informal Resolution of Disputes. The steps taken for the facilitation and resolution of complaints, filed by Overseas Pakistanis, were also highlighted. The Mohtasib further informed that the awareness campaign, undertaken by the Ombudsman, had greatly increased its outreach as well as helped address people's complaints at their

doorsteps. Highlighting the significance of Mohtasib in the provision of expeditious justice and curbing corrupt practices, the President said that Mohtasib was helping promote good governance and delivering free-of-cost justice to people. He stressed the need to further enhance awareness among the people about the role and services of Mohtasib in the provision of timely justice against maladministration of government departments. He also urged the need to further expand the outreach of the Mohtasib to far-flung areas of the country, besides improving people's access to Mohtasib by utilizing modern technology. The President lauded the performance of the Wafaqi Mohtasib and said that it was doing a remarkable job by providing prompt relief to the people.



ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Madad Ali Sindhvi called on caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.—DNA

# HEC trains IPFP programme fellows pre-service

**MEHTAB PIRZADA**

ISLAMABAD : The National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE), Higher Education Commission (HEC), has concluded Cohort X and XI of the National Faculty Development Programme for the Interim Placement of the Fresh PhDs (IPFP) programme. The NFDP, a pioneering initiative by NAHE, has been designed to prepare recently graduated PhDs for their teaching roles in higher education institutions. This pre-service training imparts critical techniques and skill-sets that will enhance their

teaching practices in the future. The programme ensures a seamless transition from theoretical knowledge to practical implementation. In his remarks on the occasion, Executive Director HEC Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum emphasised the pivotal role of educational institutions in solving the challenges faced by Pakistan. He emphasised the significance of the quality of faculty in imparting quality education. He also dilated on the challenges faced by faculty and underlined the importance of self-development and continuous learning in faculty. He emphasised the need

for knowledge-based interactions. Dr. Qayyum also addressed the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on education, urging the fellows to transform themselves to meet the changing dynamics. He discussed the relevance of digital equivalence, metaverse concepts, and the potential of AI techniques for personalised tutoring and learning. During her welcome note at the closing ceremony, Managing Director NAHE Ms. Noor Anna Malik extended heartfelt congratulations to the newly certified IPFP Fellows for their successful completion of the training

and their enthusiastic participation throughout the programme. She reflected on the transformative experience within the programme and encouraged the IPFP Fellows to excel and carve a niche for themselves. She stressed the importance of incorporating societal values into teaching, encouraging research, and nurturing critical thinking. The completion of Cohort X & XI marks a significant achievement in NAHE's efforts to elevate the quality of higher education in Pakistan, fostering excellence in teaching, research, and innovation for the benefit of future generations.

# Pakistan's exports to China reached \$1.72 billion

ISLAMABAD : Pakistani exports to China are on the rise. Exports reached \$1.72 billion in the first 7 months of FY24, a 46% increase compared to \$1.1 billion during the same period last year. Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday, quoting Federal Minister for Commerce, In-

dustries and Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz. This increase of \$544 million in seven months is a significant achievement and is the result of Pakistan's renewed focus on China, and a testament to the strong economic ties between the two nations. Chairing a meeting on the

\$100 billion Export Vision at the Ministry of Commerce, the Minister laid out a roadmap to achieve this ambitious target in 5 years. From diversifying products and markets to streamlining processes and creating a favorable ecosystem for enhancing exports, it's all

hands on deck", he added. Pakistan's imports from China remained relatively stable during this period with a nominal increase of less than one percent. Imports from China into Pakistan were recorded at \$7.709 billion in the first seven months of FY24, compared to \$7.658 billion during the same period last year. The Ministry of Commerce in Pakistan is playing a pivotal role in promoting trade of the country.—APP

# Cement exports surge, reach \$135.925 million

ISLAMABAD : The exports of cement witnessed an increase of 58.77 per cent during the first six months of the financial year 2023-24, as against the exports of the corresponding months of last year. The cement exports from the country were recorded at US \$135.925 million during July-December (2023-24) against the exports of US \$85.611 million during July- December (2022-23), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). In terms of quantity, the exports of cement also surged by 104.50 per cent going up from 1,713,289 metric tons to 3,503,650 metric tons, according to the data. Meanwhile, year-on-year basis, the exports of cement witnessed an increase of 151.11 per cent during the month of December 2023 as compared to the same month of last year. The exports of cement from the country during December 2023 were recorded at US \$21.927 million against the exports of US \$8.732 million in December 2022. On a month-on-month basis, exports of cement witnessed an increase by 4.86 per cent during December 2023 when compared to the exports of US \$20.911 million in November 2023, the PBS data revealed.

# Wheat output forecast exceeds 28.86 million tons

ISLAMABAD : The wheat output in the country during the current season is likely to reach over 28.86 million tons, which would further help in cementing the efforts of the government to achieve sustainable agriculture growth and economic development. Wheat cultivation relies heavily on irrigation water, so the ample water supply as reported by IRSA along with record planting areas indicated the potential for another strong harvest during the crop season 2024-25, said Imtiaz Ahmad Gopang Food Security Commissioner in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. However, the actual production outcomes will depend on factors such as growing conditions and accessibility of essential inputs particularly fertilizers, he told media on Wednesday. Additionally, weather patterns in March and April crucial for the grains' development and maturation will significantly impact the final output, he added. He said that according to the provincial crop reporting services, wheat production for the Punjab Province was forecast at 23.50 million metric tons, and Sindh at 3.3 million metric tons respectively. Meanwhile, the output for the provinces including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan was expected to reach at 1.474 million metric tons and 21.274 million metric tons respectively. Imtiaz Ahmad said that owing to the incentives introduced by the government, wheat sowing in the country during the current season (Rabi 2023-24) increased by 7.5 per cent as compared to the crop sowing of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period under review, wheat sowing had been completed over 23.69 million acres as against the set targets of 22.22 million acres, he said adding that the wheat crop has been sown across more than 23.69 million acres of land in various crop-growing regions during the current season to meet local staple food requirements and maintain strategic reserves throughout the year. The wheat cultivation targets fixed for the period under review were achieved by 107 per cent as crop sowing in two major grain-producing provinces Sindh and Punjab gained momentum as both the provinces surpassed their assigned targets for the current season, he added. He said that the post-flood phenomenon in Sindh has also contributed to massive wheat sowing as adequate moisture in fields during crop cultivation supplemented the overall area under wheat production.—DNA

# PTA assures uninterrupted internet services on Feb 8

Telecommunication authority says no government directives for internet shutdown

**ADIL SHAHEEN**

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) assured on Wednesday that internet services will not be suspended in the country on February 8 (tomorrow) as the nation heads to polls. According to an official statement from the PTA, users can expect internet facilities to be available without interruption or obstacles on the day of the election. Importantly, the government has not issued any directives to shut down internet services on polling day. The confirmation comes a day after Information Minister Murtaza Solangi stated that the government has not issued any guidelines for the shutdown of mobile phone services and the internet during the elections. Highlighting that in case of a

deteriorating law and order situation in any location, the local administration will evaluate the circumstances and make a decision accordingly. Two days ago, Amnesty International (AI), in collaboration with several other human rights organisations, issued a call to authorities in Pakistan, urging them to guarantee uninterrupted access to the Internet and digital communication platforms for all citizens across the country during the upcoming elections. The appeal came in response to a statement made by Caretaker Interior Minister Gohar Ejaz earlier on February 6, acknowledging the possibility of internet disruptions and shutdowns during Thursday's polls. Addressing a news conference in the federal capital Ejaz dispelled rumours surrounding the elections on Feb 8, saying until now the authorities had

not received any directives to shut down the internet services on the day. He added that any such action would only be taken upon a request from a province or a district. "As of now, no decision has been to shut down mobile or internet services. However, if necessary, considerations are made based on security requests from specific districts or provinces [internet and mobile service will be suspended]," he remarked. Expressing concern over the potential limitations on internet access, AI underscored the importance of upholding the right to freedom of expression and ensuring that citizens can freely share and access information online. Internet services have been affected thrice in the past two months. The first time was on December 17, the second on January 7, and the

latest one on January 20. The suspensions coincided with the PTI's virtual events. The interim government attributed the internet outages across the country to "technical issues", stating that there was no assurance that such incidents would not recur in the future. On January 24, the Sindh High Court (SHC) restrained the relevant authorities from suspending internet services till the general elections. The SHC ordered the caretaker federal government and the PTA to ensure uninterrupted internet services till the polling day. The order came on a petition filed by human rights defender and lawyer Jibran Nasir, who is contesting the polls for PS-110 as an independent candidate, against the frequent "unconstitutional" internet outages in the country in recent days. Recently, the PTI moved the Supreme Court,

urging it to take notice of the disruption of popular social media platforms including X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. In light of these developments, the rights organisations specifically called upon Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to take proactive measures to guarantee full internet access and social media usage throughout the election period. AI and its partners emphasised that any disruptions to internet access during the election would not only undermine the democratic process but also impede the ability of citizens to access crucial information and express their viewpoints freely. The ability to access the internet and utilise social media platforms is vital for citizens to participate in democratic processes, engage in informed discourse, and exercise their fundamental rights.

## PID Prepares for Comprehensive Polling Coverage

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD : Press Information Department (PID) has made elaborate arrangements for coverage of the polling and the elections results on February 08, 2024. For coverage of polling stations 37 media teams of local and foreign correspondents will be conducted at various polling stations in the urban and rural areas by PID headquarters and its regional offices, said a press release issued here Wednesday. In addition, PID has set up election media centers in Islamabad and its regional offices at the provincial capitals. The center at Islamabad has been equipped with the latest means of communication to enable journalists to file their reports through the fastest available means. The Election Media Centre will make available to the journalists all the necessary facilities under one roof, where journalists will be able to instantly receive election results as announced by the Election Commission and transmit the same to their respective media outlets. All the regional offices will also set up media Election Media Centre at their respective stations.

## APHC urges UN to address Kashmir dispute

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD : The All Parties Hurriyat Conference has appealed to the United Nations to put pressure on India to settle the lingering Kashmir dispute as per the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council. According to Kashmir Media Service, illegally detained APHC leaders, Molvi Bashir Ahmed Irfani, Abdul Ahmad Parra and Bilal Siddiqi, in their separate messages from jails in Srinagar and Jammu region said the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India has become a nuclear flashpoint in South Asia. They said peace will continue to elude South Asia till the Kashmir dispute remains unresolved. They said the dialogue is the best way to settle this long-pending dispute. They urged the UN to impress upon India to stop its state terrorism in illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir and fulfil its promise of giving the Kashmiris their right to self-determination.

## Mohiuddin Wani, DC inspect schools up-gradation

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD : On Wednesday, Special Secretary Education Mohiuddin Wani, along with Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon, visited various schools in the capital to oversee the ongoing upgradation process for the provision of basic amenities to the students. The focus of their visit was to ensure that government schools are providing top-notch facilities to students. Memon emphasized the importance of modernizing educational infrastructure to create conducive learning environments, ICT spokesmen Dr. Abdullah Tabasum said while talking to media here. He also commended the Ministry of Education for its pivotal role in this initiative, highlighting ongoing efforts to bring government schools up to modern standards. Irfan Memon also praised Mohiuddin Wani's dedicated attention to the education sector. "Across Islamabad, government schools are undergoing a comprehensive overhaul with support from the Ministry of Education. This visit underscores the commitment to enhancing educational facilities for students across the city," he concluded.



## Briefs

## IESCO ensures seamless electricity for election day

ISLAMABAD : The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has taken proactive measures to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply on Election Day. According to the spokesperson of IESCO, the company has set up a central control room to monitor the demand and supply of electricity in the region. Leaves for field officers and staff have been cancelled, with instructions to remain on high alert for 24 hours. Monitoring cells have been established in six operational circles, providing necessary materials to field offices. The scheduled shutdown from 7th to 9th February for system maintenance has been cancelled to ensure uninterrupted power supply during this critical period. The Chief Executive and Chief Engineer Operations will personally oversee the operations to ensure efficient management. Field formations are in constant communication with district administrations to swiftly address any potential issues. The complaint helpline numbers at the office, accessible at 118, have been fully activated to promptly address any electricity-related concerns. —APP

## 24th death anniversary of Munawar Mirza observed

ISLAMABAD : The twenty-fourth death anniversary of the eminent expert on Iqbal, researcher, historian and poet Muhammad Munawar Mirza (1927-2000) was observed on Wednesday. He was born in Bhira (Sargodha). He did Masters in Urdu, Arabic and Philosophy from Punjab University. In 1980, he retired as the President of Urdu Department of Government College Lahore. Until 1985, he was the president of the Department of Iqbaliat of Punjab University. Later he also served as the director of Iqbal Academy Pakistan. Muhammad Munawar Mirza left many memorable books on the subject of Iqbal, including 'Mizan-i-Iqbal', 'Iqan-i-Iqbal', 'Burhan-i-Iqbal', 'Alama Iqbal's Persian Ghazal' and 'Qurtas-i-Iqbal'. —APP

## Experts call to move away from iTFAs

ISLAMABAD: A symposium was held in the federal capital on the health hazards of trans fatty acids (TFAs), where experts stressed the need for stakeholders' engagement and capacity building of regulators to enforce harmonised standards to counter its hazards. TFAs are fatty acids that are naturally occurring in meat and dairy products, whereas iTFAs are produced after hydrogenation and are mainly found in bakery products, and frozen and refrigerated items. The symposium titled, 'Reducing Industrial Trans Fatty Acids (iTFA)' in Pakistan was jointly organised by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and Cargill Pakistan. Islamabad Food Regulatory Authority Deputy Director, Dr Tahira Siddiqui, in her presentation, said "Pakistan is the second highest consumer of iTFAs in the world as after petroleum products, its edible oil imports were the largest, worth \$4.3 billion." Stressing the need to ensure dialogue between industry and technical experts to shift from iTFAs, she said, "Industries need to come up with alternatives to iTFAs in their production process and when choosing raw materials. For this purpose, they can be given incentives to promote a shift from iTFAs towards embracing alternatives." She added that it is a complex challenge to eradicate iTFAs, however it can be achieved by adopting efficient policies, and multifaceted approaches to engage all stakeholders. Tehzeeb Bakers Consultant Saqib said there is no facility for the isomerisation of edible oils in Pakistan. —APP

## Kyrgyzstan aims to boost business ties with Pakistan

President ICCI said that Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan can cooperate in many areas including agriculture, industry, energy, and tourism

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD : Ulanbek Totuiev, Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan said that his country is enjoying friendly relations with Pakistan and is interested in further boosting its business ties with Pakistan to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. He stressed that both countries should develop sustainable business relations as they have good potential to cooperate in many sectors of the economy. He said that a business delegation from Pakistan should visit Kyrgyzstan to explore joint ventures and business partnerships. He said that Kyrgyzstan is importing pharmaceuticals, sports goods, and some other products from Pakistan while it is exporting dry fruits, and agricultural products to Pakistan. He said that both countries should do business in more products as they have good potential for it. He assured that his embassy would cooperate with ICCI in the initiatives for promoting business linkages between the private sectors of both countries. Speaking at the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry said that Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan can cooperate in many areas including agriculture, industry, energy, and tourism. He said that the geographical location of both countries offers them good potential to increase collaboration and play a role in promoting regional trade in their respective



regions. He said that Pakistan can provide Kyrgyzstan with easy access to many promising markets including the Middle East and South Asia. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan can provide Pakistan with easy access to the Central Asian States. Therefore, strong trade and economic relations would be very beneficial for both countries and

regions. He said that Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan should focus on diversification of trade to achieve better results. He said that ICCI would consider taking a business delegation to Kyrgyzstan to explore business partnerships. Faad Waheed Senior Vice President ICCI said that Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan should share

expertise to benefit each other. He said that both countries should explore all untapped areas of cooperation to strengthen business relations. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that the Kyrgyz Republic should take advantage of Pakistani seaports

to get access to other potential markets. He said that road, rail, and air links between Pakistan and Central Asian countries are important to develop strong business and people-to-people relations. Sheikh Muhammad Ejaz, Maqsood Tabish, Khalid Chaudhry, and others were also present at the meeting.

## Sindh produces eminent writers including Ali Baba: Madad Ali

ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Madad Ali Sindh said on Wednesday that the civilization of Sindh was multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic and had produced many eminent writers and Ali Baba was one of them. He was delivering his speech at the launch of the book on the life and achievements

of renowned Sindhi writer Ali Muhammad popularly known as Ali Baba here. The book "Ali Baba's Personality and Art" was written by writer and columnist and Caretaker Federal Minister for Education Madad Ali Sindh. The minister said he was one of the lucky ones who saw Ali Baba in various cities of the province. Madad Ali maintained that Sindh was a province

with a strong culture and civilization and Sheikh Ayaz was considered among the great modern poets of the province. Madad Ali Sindh said that he had written about the personality of Ali Baba in great detail in the book. Despite being a great writer Alibaba was oblivious to his greatness, Madad Ali said, adding that Ali Baba's writings reveal the depth of human

existence and self. About the works of Ali Baba, the minister said he contributed wonderful works like the novel Moenjo Daro and drama Dungi Manj Darya. Terming Ali Baba's art as immortal and timeless, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi hoped his writings would be translated into Urdu, English and other languages. —APP

## HEC transforms education through smart teaching

ISLAMABAD : Higher Education Commission (HEC) Chairman Dr Mukhtar Ahmed Wednesday said that his department was taking various steps to transform traditional education system with latest technology and introducing projects including 'smart teaching' 'smart campuses' and 'smart university' to promote multi-technology ecosystem. In an exclusive interview with PTV news channel, he said that the aim is to equip and prepare

the younger generation and students with the advanced technology and knowledge in the digital industry. He said that HEC is working to develop a new system of learning where the ever-expanding technological challenges are met, adding, the Government is working hard to provide internet access, better infrastructure and facilities which can benefit students. He said online tools and classrooms will also provide an opportunity for students and teachers to

introduce blended learning, adding, HEC is moving towards an affiliation policy, online education policy, artificial intelligence and systems approach. Replying a question, he said that collective efforts are need of hour to bring reforms, adding, HEC with the help of all related departments was reviewing its policies. He said that a long-term strategies are being implemented to allow universities to excel in providing quality technology-based education

to open virtual campuses. "HEC is committed to materialising the dream of making Pakistan a digital country", he mentioned. To another question, he said that in a significant step towards enhancing data accessibility and obtaining international recognition, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has also established 2 cutting-edge Data Centers. These Data Centers will also facilitate high-speed, secure, and reliable access to data, offering a significant advantage to researchers at Pakistani universities, he added. —APP

## Polling material delivered to officers in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD : District Returning Officer of Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon on Wednesday said polling material was being delivered to the presiding officers of three different constituencies including NA-46, NA-47 and NA-48. Irfan Nawaz Memon, who is also Deputy Commissioner of Islamabad, told the media that the exercise was being carried out under strong security cover and in the wake of the looming general elections scheduled for February 8. The polling materials including ballot boxes, ballot papers, and other essential items, he added. In adherence to the Election Commission's code of conduct, he said clear instructions were issued to all presiding officers Officers stationed at polling stations to ensure a smooth and transparent election process. Irfan Memon said the exercise was a crucial step towards conducting free, fair, and credible elections that provided an ample opportunity to the citizens to exercise their democratic right to vote. —DNA

## Illegal Afghan nationals repatriate in large numbers

ISLAMABAD : Illegal Afghan residents are steadily returning to their homeland from Pakistan, with figures reaching a significant milestone. According to recent reports, a total of 484,332 individuals have made the decision to leave Pakistan and embark on the journey back to Afghanistan. The repatriation process, which has been ongoing, signifies a notable effort to address the issue of illegal residency and provide support for those seeking to return to their home country. This movement reflects a collaborative effort between Afghan and Pakistani authorities to ensure a smooth transition for returning citizens. From February 3 to February 6 alone, a remarkable 3,076 Afghan citizens bid farewell to the cities they once resided in Pakistan. Among them were 1,145 men, 924 women, and 1,007 children, each making the courageous choice to return to their roots. To facilitate the return journey, authorities have mobilized resources, including 142 vehicles, to transport 212 families back to Afghanistan. —APP



ISLAMABAD : Pakistan's Ambassador-designate to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Major General (ret'd) Syed Qaiser Abbas Shah, called on President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. —DNA

## ECP official dispels EMS hacking fears

Zafar Iqbal Hussain, the Special Secretary of the Election Commission, added that Presiding Officers will display the results outside the polling stations

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) IT Director, Khizar Aziz, dispelled the fears of 'hacking Election Management System' (EMS) in upcoming general elections 2024, saying that no public networks are being utilized for transmitting election results. "Private networks will be employed for the purpose which eliminates concerns about the hacking of the EMS," Aziz told a private news channel. He highlighted that the EMS was equipped with special software, securely housed in the offices of 859 Returning Officers (RO), with the provision of four data entry operators, four laptops, and IT equipment. Simultaneously, Aziz stated the EMS was

also installed in the mobile phones of Presiding Officers (PO) who will capture an image of Form 45 and send it to the Returning Officer. In case of network issue, Form 45 will automatically deliver to the RO once a signal is restored. He explained the process of Section 95, where the Presiding Officer is required to visit the RO's office and display Form 45 on their mobile device. The form will self-lock on the Presiding Officer's mobile, ensuring data integrity. Elucidating the working of EMS, Khizar Aziz stated that during the creation of Form 47 the RO will verify that Form 45 is locked on the Presiding Officer's mobile. Computers in the RO office, he said will operate in three modes for national and provincial assemblies, conducting online

data entry. In case of network disconnection, the software will seamlessly switch to an offline mode. Regarding connectivity, he mentioned the existence of a third toll apart from online and offline modes. The ECP IT Director said the Commission has improved the Result Management System from the previous version, ensuring a robust infrastructure connected via fiber optics. Where fiber optics are unavailable, satellite connectivity is utilized. Zafar Iqbal Hussain, the Special Secretary of the Election Commission, added that Presiding Officers will display the results outside the polling stations. He emphasized the importance of polling agents signing Form 45, reinforcing the commitment to transparency in the electoral process.

## Punjab records 10 more child deaths from pneumonia

RAWALPINDI : The distressing trend of child fatalities due to pneumonia persists in Punjab - the largest province - with 10 additional children succumbing to the illness in the past 24 hours. According to the Punjab Health Department, the province reported a staggering 427 new cases of pneumonia within the same period, with Lahore alone registering 149 fresh cases. The latest data reveals a grim picture, with Punjab witnessing a total of 319 fatalities and 20,872 reported cases of pneumonia thus far this year. In Lahore, the figures stand at 58 deaths and 4,050 cases reported during the same period. Health experts have sounded the alarm, attributing the surge in pneumonia cases primarily to the hazardous smog engulfing Punjab, exacerbated by rampant air pollution during the winter season. Vaccination measures Responding to the critical situation, Dr Jamal Nasir, the caretaker health minister of Punjab, issued mandatory vaccination instructions for children against pneumonia on January 11. Dr Nasir stressed that free diagnosis and treatment facilities for pneumonia are available in all government hospitals across the province. Symptoms and causes He highlighted common symptoms of pneumonia, including difficulty in breathing, cough, cold, and fever. Precautions, such as ensuring children wear warm clothes and limiting exposure to cold, were stressed to protect against pneumonia. Causes of pneumonia in children were attributed to factors like lack of breastfeeding, pollution, malnutrition, prolonged exposure to cold, and weakened immune systems. Pneumonia, even in its mild form, can pose a significant threat to life. Symptoms include phlegm and cough, fever, profuse sweating or chills, shortness of breath during normal activities, chest pain when breathing or coughing, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, and headaches. The severity of symptoms may vary based on age and health conditions. —DNA

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Phone: 051-2266165 / 051-2261960

Off 11: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad

## Legitimacy of US military actions questionable

The recent series of air strikes by the United States on Iran-backed military targets in Syria and Iraq have sparked international concern, as they are a clear violation of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of these nations. Robert Wood, the US alternate representative for special political affairs at the United Nations, defended these actions as being "necessary and proportionate", citing a country's "inherent right of self-defense" under Article 51 of the UN Charter. However, attempting to use this right to justify unauthorized military operations in the territories of other sovereign nations that a country is not at war with distorts the concept of self-defense. The lack of approval from the nations concerned and the absence of pre-notification prior to the air strikes – which the US initially claimed it had done but which it later admitted it hadn't – further underscores the US' disregard for the principle of respecting other nations' sovereignty, as stipulated in the UN Charter. While State Department spokesman Vedant Patel claimed that Iraq and other regional countries "understood" the US' actions, which were in response to the deaths of three US soldiers, the criticism of the strikes expressed by Syria, Iraq and Iran contradicts this assertion and highlights the unilateral nature of the US' actions. Rather than being acts of self-defense, the air strikes can be seen as retaliatory measures for the deaths of the US military personnel, as indicated by President Joe Biden's statement: "If you harm an American, we will respond." This reflects a retaliatory and vengeful stance rather than a defensive posture. Moreover, the distance of the initial attacks from the US military personnel and the broader historical context of US military involvement in the region suggest a pattern of escalating tensions rather than genuine self-defense. Rosemary DiCarlo, under-secretary-general for political and peace-building affairs of the UN, has emphasized the volatile nature of the Middle East and called for active engagement to prevent further escalation and the deterioration of regional peace and security. Any more long-arm US military actions are not conducive to this and will only exacerbate tensions rather than alleviate them. It is imperative for all parties involved to exercise restraint, adhere to the UN Charter and international laws, and, most importantly, refrain from illegal military actions that violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other nations. The US needs to demonstrate some restraint and abide by the established rules of the international community.



## Shame on India for its coercion of Sri Lanka

Some Indian media outlets seemed irrepressible when they reported "India beats China in diplomatic duel" earlier this week, referring to an Indian Navy submarine visiting Colombo, capital of Sri Lanka, on the weekend, shortly after the island country suspended its reception of Chinese research ships under New Delhi's pressure. Their crowing exposes how New Delhi is setting up obstacles to obstruct the development of India-China relations while trying to pass the buck for the souring relations to Beijing. To begin with, New Delhi has been smearing China's marine research ships that belong to the State Oceanic Administration of China as "spy ships" of the People's Liberation Army Navy. Deep sea research is a cradle for new findings and technologies. Many countries do it by themselves or under multilateral cooperation frameworks. As long as China follows relevant international laws and codes, India has no right to interfere in it, let alone by coercing small island countries to do it in its stead. That marine research ships of different countries stop for fueling and supplies in foreign ports is a normal practice. Not to mention the Chinese marine research ships' mission can also be of high value to the engineering and biological security of the ongoing Colombo Port City construction project, which is being carried out and funded by Chinese companies despite the project being ceaselessly vilified and hindered by New Delhi since it started 10 years ago. Under India's pressure, Colombo unilaterally suspended the hundreds of billions of dollars' project in 2015, citing the project's potential impact on the marine environment. After Sri Lanka realized how beneficial the project, which is tantamount to building the country a new city on the sea, would be and found no other country had the capability to complete it, it came back to China. If India really thinks it can replace China in such projects, it should have helped Sri Lanka to complete the Colombo Port City project in 2015 soon after it pressured the country to dump China. The project will be completed in 20 to 25 years with even China's sizable input and world-class civil engineering efficiency. To force Colombo to shut the door on Chinese research ships while China is still helping the country build its largest construction project in history is by no means a diplomatic success for India, but a shame. It only serves to show New Delhi's narrow-mindedness and lack of vision in handling relations with Beijing and its neighbors. Those in New Delhi who view the Indian Ocean as India's sphere of influence should be reminded that a public square outside of one's door is not private property even if it bears one's name.

## Electoral epochs: Pakistan's path to democratic maturity

Dr. Muhammad Anwar Farooq

As we examine the historical significance of general elections held in 2002, 2008, 2013, and 2018, it becomes evident that they have been instrumental in strengthening democracy in Pakistan. The general elections of 2002 were pivotal in Pakistan's transition from military rule to civilian governance under the leadership of General Pervez Musharraf. Despite criticisms of electoral manipulation and restrictions on political freedoms, these elections introduced several reforms aimed at increasing political participation and representation. The establishment of reserved seats for women and

Pakistan's journey with general elections over the past two decades has been marked by significant milestones, challenges, and triumphs. These electoral processes have played a crucial role in shaping the political interface of the country, ushering in periods of transition, consolidation, and reform. As we examine the historical significance of general elections held in 2002, 2008, 2013, and 2018, it becomes evident that they have been instrumental in strengthening democracy in Pakistan. The general elections of 2002 were pivotal in Pakistan's transition from military rule to civilian governance under the leadership of General Pervez Musharraf. Despite criticisms of electoral manipulation and restrictions on political freedoms, these elections introduced several reforms aimed at increasing political participation and representation. The establishment of reserved seats for women and minorities, as well as the devolution of power to local government bodies, laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and decentralized political system. The general elections of 2008 marked a significant turning point in Pakistan's political landscape with the restoration of democracy following the end of General Musharraf's regime. Despite security concerns and allegations of electoral irregularities, these elections saw a historic voter turnout, signaling a renewed sense of political engagement among the populace. The victory of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) led by Asif Ali Zardari, brought hopes for democratic consolidation and institutional reforms. The general elections of 2013 were characterized by a smooth transition of power from one civilian government to another, a rare feat in Pakistan's history. With a turnout of over 55%, these elections witnessed a highly competitive political environment, marked by the emergence of new parties and coalitions. The Pakistan Muslim League

Nawaz (PML-N) secured a decisive victory, forming the government under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif. Despite some allegations of electoral irregularities, international observers generally deemed the elections as credible and reflective of the people's will. The general elections of 2018 were perhaps one of the most anticipated and consequential in Pakistan's recent history. With a record-breaking voter turnout of over 55%, these elections saw widespread enthusiasm and participation, particularly among young voters. The victory of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led by Imran Khan marked a significant departure from traditional political dynasties and signaled a desire for change and reform. Despite concerns raised by opposition parties regarding alleged electoral manipulation, international observers largely praised the conduct of the elections as free and fair. The general elections from 2002 to 2018 have yielded several positive outcomes that have contributed to the strengthening of democracy in Pakistan. With each successive election, there has been a gradual increase in voter turnout, indicating a growing sense of civic responsibility and political engagement among the populace. The emergence of new political parties and grassroots movements has diversified the political landscape, providing citizens with a wider range of choices and alternatives. Despite occasional disputes and allegations of electoral fraud, Pakistan has witnessed a peaceful transfer of power between civilian governments, reinforcing the country's commitment to democratic governance and institutional stability. Moreover, the peaceful transfer of power reflects the resilience of Pakistan's democratic institutions, including its electoral commission, judiciary, and civil society. These institutions play a vital role in ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and adjudicating disputes in a fair and transparent manner. While challenges such as electoral fraud and disputes may arise, the fact that Pakistan has been able to navigate these challenges without resorting to violence or authoritarian measures is a positive sign

for the country's democratic future. It underscores the importance of continued efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, uphold the rule of law, and promote civic engagement and accountability. General elections have provided opportunities for institutional reforms aimed at improving electoral transparency, fairness, and accountability. The introduction of biometric verification systems, electronic voting machines, and voter education initiatives has helped address some of the challenges associated with electoral integrity and credibility. General elections have empowered marginalized groups, including women and minorities, by providing them with a platform to voice their concerns and participate in the political process. The establishment of reserved seats and affirmative action measures has helped bridge the gap in political representation, ensuring that the diverse needs and perspectives of all segments of society are taken into account. The general election of 2024 in Pakistan arrives as yet another crucial milestone in the nation's democratic journey, characterized by a rich tapestry of successes, challenges, and reforms over the past two decades. Reflecting on the historical significance of general elections held in 2002, 2008, 2013, and 2018 unveils the pivotal role they've played in shaping Pakistan's political landscape and advancing its democratic ideals. As Pakistan prepares for the general election of 2024, it must build upon the successes and lessons learned from past elections. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting inclusivity, and upholding the rule of law will be essential for ensuring a free, fair, and transparent electoral process. By continuing to uphold its commitment to democracy, Pakistan can chart a course towards a more prosperous and equitable future for all its citizens.

—The writer is Institute of Humanities and Art

Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan

## After 30 years, US needs to let regional leaders take over

Osama Al-Sharif

The Pentagon said that more airstrikes can be expected. At the same time, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan announced that the US airstrikes were just the beginning of a sustained response and he refused to rule out strikes on Iranian soil itself. Meanwhile, American and British fighter jets and ships have carried out another round of bombings against Houthi positions in Yemen in a bid to stop the group from disrupting shipping in the Red Sea. The Houthis, as well as Iraqi militias associated with Tehran, vowed to retaliate. Also, Israel launched another attack against suspected Iranian targets

The US has carried out a series of retaliatory airstrikes against pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria in response to the fatal drone attack that killed three of its soldiers and injured more than 30 at a base in northeastern Jordan last week. Announcing the strikes, President Joe Biden said the US was not looking to engage in a broader conflict in the region. The Pentagon said that more airstrikes can be expected. At the same time, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan announced that the US airstrikes were just the beginning of a sustained response and he refused to rule out strikes on Iranian soil itself. Meanwhile, American and British fighter jets and ships have carried out another round of bombings against Houthi positions in Yemen in a bid to stop the group from disrupting shipping in the Red Sea. The Houthis, as well as Iraqi militias associated with Tehran, vowed to retaliate. Also, Israel launched another attack against suspected Iranian targets in the Syrian capital, Damascus. Despite the US response, Republican and conservative pundits in Washington were not satisfied and called on the Biden administration to strike deep into Iran, something that the White House is not willing to do at this time. After more than 30 years of direct military involvement in the region, it would be naive to think that airstrikes will change the geopolitical reality. The Houthis and the pro-Iran proxies in Iraq and Syria will be able to regroup and rebuild their arsenals. After all, this is what a proxy war, orchestrated by the Iranians, is all about: a long and costly war of attrition. Pro-Iranian militias in Iraq are part of the Popular Mobilization Units, which is now functioning under the Iraqi army and whose leaders are represented in the Iraqi parliament. It does not get more complicated than this. The US should have learned by now that no amount of military power can achieve self-serving political objectives. The Houthis have a firm grip on most of Yemen and, despite the US-UK strikes, remain capable of disrupting shipping lanes in the Red Sea. Both Iran and Iraq have condemned the US strikes, with Tehran calling them a "strategic mistake" and Baghdad saying they represented a "blatant violation of sovereignty." Any direct attack on Iran will almost certainly result in a wider conflagration and sink the US deeper into the region's quagmire, when the strategic American thinking for the past decade or so has centered on the need to pivot from the region toward South Asia and the Pacific Rim. The lesson the US should have learned by now is that no amount of military power and munitions can achieve self-serving political objectives. The invasion of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan and the Libyan debacle are a few searing examples. So, one should ask the Biden administration

about America's endgame, both in this latest escalation and in the long run. The sad fact is that US diplomatic resources have never matched its military presence in the Middle East. Like Israel, the US puts deterrence ahead of diplomacy when dealing with regional challenges. Israel's deterrence collapsed on Oct. 7 and it took more than 170 attacks on US bases in Iraq and Syria to deliver the message to the Americans that their deterrence had been dented as well. The symptoms have been there for a long time. These include the US' withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the reimposition of US sanctions on Tehran, the uneasy relationship between Baghdad and Washington over America's military presence on Iraqi soil, the occupation of eastern Syria and the alliance with Syria's Kurds, and the indifference to Israel's most right-wing government's provocations and persecution of Palestinians. Then came Oct. 7 and Hamas' attack on Israel, which catapulted the entire region into a vortex of violence and chaos. Israel's war on Gaza has triggered reactions across the region. US diplomacy showed its limits when it came to stopping the genocidal war. America enabled Israel's embrace of a military solution to a seven-decade-old conflict, which, even after more than 120 days of horrific bombing and carnage, has achieved nothing. America's diplomatic resources have been circumvented by its bias in favor of Israel and by its blind reliance on military superiority. America's bombing campaign will also prove shortsighted. It may contain the proxy war and curtail the capabilities of pro-Iranian militias for some time, but it will hardly change the geopolitical realities on the ground. And so, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken embarks on his fifth tour of the region since Oct. 7 carrying many files, all interconnected and all getting more complicated by the day. He is said to be seeking to pressure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept a long-term pause in the war on Gaza in return for a deal to release some of the Israeli captives, while facilitating the uninterrupted flow of aid to Gaza. He will also seek to cement assurances that Hezbollah and Israel will not engage in an open war, the details of which remain unclear. Blinken will also discuss ways to commit Israel to a Palestinian state, hoping to revive the path toward further normalization deals. He may also be seeking to restore some line of communication with Tehran through Qatar to defuse tensions in the region and restore regular shipping activity in the Red Sea. That is a lot on Blinken's plate. But if he had listened to America's regional allies before, his mission would have been much more manageable. For immediate tensions to subside, the war in Gaza must end. This is something that the US has refused to seek, i.e., by

calling for a ceasefire. Instead, Washington was manipulated by Netanyahu in a way that strained America's ties with its regional allies. The US has the necessary leverage to apply on Netanyahu, but it has so far lacked the political will to do so. America's diplomatic resources have been circumvented by its bias in favor of Israel and by its blind reliance on its military superiority. Both have undermined its credibility in the region and beyond. More than three decades since the US invasion of Iraq, the Middle East looks more fragmented and more volatile than ever. The US has turned national states into failed states, triggered sectarian violence and enabled religious fundamentalism and non-state actors to dominate the scene today. What 30 years of US domination of the region has done is unforgivable. On the other hand, we do not have a two-state solution and Israel is now on the verge of liquidating the Palestinian issue and erasing Palestinian identity. The US has failed to listen to its regional allies and heed their warnings. It has appeased a psychopath, Netanyahu, who unabashedly rejects anything to do with Palestinian statehood. It is time for the US to allow the region's leaders to fix a broken Middle East with as little interference as possible. This week, the influential Foreign Affairs magazine ran an article titled, "Only the Middle East Can Fix the Middle East: The Path to a Post-American Regional Order." The writers, Dalia Dassa Kaye and Sanam Vakil, argue that the US is not in a position to resolve the multilayered problems of the region and local leaders "will have to step up and define a collective way forward." They add: "It is well past time for the Middle East to have a standing forum for regional security that establishes a permanent venue for dialogue among its own powers." Several regional leaders have the means and the intellect to forge such a forum. We have seen mature attempts to resolve conflicts through dialogue, with the Saudi-Iran rapprochement a clear example. The US was not a party to this diplomatic breakthrough. Other countries like Oman, Qatar and Egypt are also playing key roles in resolving regional conflicts.

The time has come for the US to start listening to its regional allies about managing the region instead of dictating a vision based on a legacy of broken promises and weak political will. The war on Gaza has uncovered the depth of US complicity, bias and lack of moral rectitude when it comes to embracing what is fair and right, not only for the Palestinians but for all the people of this region. The US must disengage its Middle East strategy from that of Israel if it wants to secure its interests.

—Sourced by Arab news.



## Briefs

## Over 26 killed in two blasts...

FROM PAGE 01  
A spokesperson for the ECP said directives have been issued to take action against those involved in such incidents. Speaking with Geo News, Kakar said that the blast happened in a motorcycle outside his election office. "Eight of our workers were martyred and more than 18 were injured in the explosion when the names of the polling agents were being finalised in the election office," he said. Kakar himself was in Barshore when the blast happened and is currently reaching Khanozai. The second blast targeted the JUI-F office in the Killa Saifullah district. At least 12 people were killed and 25 others injured in the second explosion, Balochistan Information Minister Achakzai said. He said JUI-F leader Maulana Abdul Wassay, who is contesting elections from PB-3, remained unhurt in the attack. Achakzai said terrorists would not succeed in their objectives and added that the war would continue until the elimination of the last terrorist.

## Pakistan committed to foster...

FROM PAGE 01  
Awami National Party (ANP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), last month, postponed the elections on the National Assembly's NA-8 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's PK-22 constituencies after independent candidate Rehan Zeb Khan was gunned down in KP's Bajaur district. Apart from this, violent clashes have also taken place involving political parties and police. Last week, at least two people were injured after PTI workers clashed with the police in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district. Before that, the PPP and the MuttahidaQaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) workers clashed on two separate occasions in Karachi - resulting in one fatality and multiple injuries.

## Nation readies for decisive...

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size of the upcoming ballot paper, asserting that a video purportedly depicting misinformation on the matter is misleading. In a statement issued by the ECP, it clarified that the ballot paper is meticulously printed in single, double, or triple columns based on the number of candidates, adhering strictly to the order of the Urdu alphabet. The Commission stressed that this standard procedure has been followed consistently, with the current election being no exception. However, the ECP highlighted that the manner of folding the ballot paper might have led to confusion. Addressing concerns over misinformation, the Election Commission urged voters to rely solely on awareness videos released by the ECP, available on its official website (www.ecp.gov.pk) and YouTube channel. The electoral watchdog emphasized the importance of seeking information from credible sources and encouraged voters to utilize the ECP helpline for any inquiries. Furthermore, Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja reiterated the Commission's commitment to transparency and accountability in the electoral process. He directed officials to ensure the timely supply of Form 45 to Returning Officers and Presiding Officers on Election Day.

## ECP postpones polling...

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Israr Hussain, died. The ECP says elections in these constituencies will be held after general election. The ECP will issue election schedule for these constituencies later.

## New Zealand claim one-sided win in first South Africa Test

The Proteas arrived in New Zealand with a severely weakened squad featuring eight uncapped players

SPORTS DESK

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: New Zealand cruised to a comprehensive 281-run victory over an inexperienced South Africa side late on the fourth day of the first Test at the Bay Oval Stadium on Wednesday. The Black Caps, holding a first-innings lead of 349, declared their second innings on 179 for four just before play commenced, setting the Proteas a daunting victory target of 529. Though South Africa never appeared close to reaching it, they displayed some resistance before seamer Kyle Jamieson (4-58) made crucial breakthroughs, while spinner Mitchell Santner (3-59) cleaned up the tail to bowl them out for 247. "Pretty happy, I think any time you win a test match inside four days it's always pretty pleasing," said New Zealand skipper Tim Southee. "We know that any South African team is going to fight, they are very passionate people, and we knew that they were going to be



up for it over this test match." Despite New Zealand having never beaten South Africa in a Test series in nearly a century of attempts if they seal the deal in the second Test in Hamilton next

week, the breakthrough victory will be significant. The Proteas arrived in New Zealand with a severely weakened squad featuring eight uncapped players, as Cricket South Africa prioritised

their financially profitable Twenty20 competition (SA20). However, New Zealand could only play against the opposition in front of them and convincingly outshone them over four mostly sunny days

at Mount Maunganui. Local hero Kane Williamson became just the fifth New Zealander to achieve a century in each innings, while all-rounder Rachin Ravindra was awarded Man of the Match for his mammoth 240 in the first innings. "Rachin we've seen over the last six months or so is a special talent and he showed in this test match what he's capable of, I'm sure he's got a bright future," added Southee. Despite New Zealand's seamers not producing many fireworks in their own conditions, they took wickets in clusters, breaking up key partnerships and restricting South African batsmen to only one half-century across the match. South Africa skipper Neil Brand was left rueing dropped catches on day one that granted reprieves to Williamson and Ravindra. "It's very deflating," said the 27-year-old, who took eight wickets in his first Test. "I felt day one, we were in the game there and if you take those two chances, you never know what will happen. But yeah, completely outplayed by a very good New Zealand team."

## ICC Rankings 2024: Jasprit Bumrah achieves elusive feat

Pakistan's Babar Azam also held onto his top spot in the ODI batters rankings

DNA

NEW DELHI: Star Indian pacer Jasprit Bumrah clinched the No.1 spot on the latest ICC Men's Test Bowler rankings on Wednesday. The right-arm seamer became the first pacer from India to claim the top Test ranking. Bumrah bagged top spot after impressive match figures of 9/91 during his side's series-equaling 106-run win over England in the second Test in Vizag. "The nine-wicket haul saw Bumrah earn Player of the Match honours in the second Test and climb three places on the latest Test rankings for bowlers

to claim top spot from teammate Ravichandran Ashwin," the ICC said in a press release. "Ashwin who has held the premier ranking since March last year - managed just three wickets for India in that same match and drops two places to third on the updated rankings for Test bowlers, with South Africa pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada maintaining his place in second despite sitting out the Proteas' Test series in New Zealand. "It is the first time Bumrah has held the top ranking, with the 30-year-old having never been previously higher than third despite a total of 10 five-wicket hauls for

his country from 34 Test match appearances. "Two of those five-wicket hauls have come in Test matches in 2024 for Bumrah, with the India pacer collecting figures of 6/61 against South Africa in Cape Town at the start of the year and then an equally impressive spell of 6/45 in his most recent appearance against England. "Bumrah is just the fourth player from India - and first fast bowler - to top the bowling charts, with Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Bishan Bedi, the only players from the Asian country to have done so previously." Bumrah's teammate Yashasvi Jaiswal also improved his rankings after his magnificent double ton during the first innings of that Vizag Test against England. "Jaiswal helped setup the victory with a career-best

209 to start the match and the youngster climbed 37 places to 29th on the latest rankings for Test batters, with New Zealand veteran Kane Williamson still leading the way at the head of proceedings," the press release added. "Australia's Steve Smith re-claimed second place on the batter rankings as England's Joe Root dropped to third, while compatriot Zak Crawley improved eight spots to 22nd following two innings in the 70s against India." Pakistan's Babar Azam also held onto his top spot in the ODI batters rankings in front of India trio Shubman Gill (second), Virat Kohli (third) and Rohit Sharma (fourth), while Abbott rose 52 places to equal 18th on the list for all-rounders after also contributing 69 runs from one innings with the bat against the West Indies.

## Mbappe demands for Real Madrid move revealed

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) forward Kylian Mbappe is likely to complete his move to Real Madrid in the 2024 summer window but the Frenchman has three demands. Mbappe's current contract with PSG ends on June 30, 2024, unless he decides to activate the optional one-year. As of now, the Frenchman is legally allowed to sign a pre-contract with any team he wishes. Multiple news outlets reported that the chances of Mbappe joining the Whites are high but the club will not offer him the same amount of money they were willing to in 2022 when the 2018 World Cup signed a new contract with PSG. As per Cadena SER, Mbappe wants a gross salary of €50 per annum. Madrid have been managing their finances exceptionally throughout the years and the current highest earner in the squad is Toni Kroos with €24m per year salary. It is unlikely Los Blancos will meet that demand. Secondly, the 25-year-old requires a whopping €125m signing bonus which would go to him and his mother/agent, Fayza Lamari. Third, the Frenchman demands to keep a percentage of his image rights. Normally, Real Madrid have retained these rights for all of their players but according to a recent report, they would make an exception for Mbappe and keep only 60% of those rights. All these demands appear to be within Real Madrid's reach. While the club would, indeed, give a massive signing bonus to the player and his agent, it is very unlikely for them to meet Mbappe's demand of €125m as in 2022, they were willing to give €70m signing bonus. - Agencies

## T20 World Cup set to a memorable 'party'

DUBAI: Tournament director Fawwaz Baksh has claimed that he Twenty20 World Cup in June will be a memorable party with strong Caribbean flavours that will help establish cricket firmly in the United States. The event will be co-hosted by six Caribbean countries along with the United States, a market considered crucial if cricket wants to become a truly global game. New York, Miami and Dallas will host a total of 16 matches which will help promoted the games in the US. "When you pair up West Indies and USA, it's a recipe for success," the Guyanese sports administrator told Reuters. "We in the West Indies are known for a great time, we're known for the party atmosphere. When fans come here and watch the games, they should expect that. "So come here to watch great cricket, but come here also to have a great experience." Demand for tickets has been encouraging as more than 1.2 million applications from 126 countries were received within the first 48 hours since the public ballot was launched last week. That included 900,000 from the U.S. and West Indies. "Introducing cricket into the U.S., which is a new market to us, we weren't quite sure what the response would be," he added. "We know there are quite a lot of expats in the United States and people from all across the world are interested in cricket. "But to see this kind of response, it's very encouraging." The ninth edition of the T20 World Cup will be the biggest yet, with the increase to 20 teams from 16. Poor attendance figures damaged the 50-overs World Cup when it was held in West Indies in 2007 but Baksh said Caribbean administrators won't repeat the mistakes they made last time. Ticket prices for this year's event start at only \$6. "If you want to introduce the sport in the U.S., if you want to revitalise cricket in the West Indies, you have to get the fans here," he said. "And the only way you can get the fans here is by making tickets attractive, making them accessible." The 43-year-old believes the World Cup will set the bar high for future global tournaments. "We all wanted this tournament here, and we all want to capitalise on it," Baksh said. - Agencies

## Simona Halep doping ban appeal begins

DNA

PARIS: The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) started hearing Simona Halep's appeal against a doping suspension that could end her tennis career. The former Wimbledon and French Open champion arrived on Wednesday at the top court in global sport in Lausanne for three-day proceedings, hoping that her provisional suspension will be lifted. The 32-year-old Romanian has been provisionally suspended since October 2022 after testing positive for roxadustat, a banned drug that leads to production of red blood cells, at the U.S. Open that year. Halep was also charged with another doping offence last year due to irregularities in her athlete biological passport (ABP), a method designed to monitor different blood parameters over time to reveal potential doping. Halep has consistently denied all the charges. The former world number one has blamed contaminated licensed supplements for her positive test at the U.S. Open. - Agencies

## Shaheen urges voting in general election 2024

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan T20 captain Shaheen Afridi urged the nation on Wednesday to vote during the general elections on February 8. "Go and vote tomorrow for better Pakistan," Afridi said on social media website X, which was formerly known as Twitter. The lanky pacer has played 29 Tests, 53 ODIs and 57 T20Is since making his debut in 2018. Afridi, who is known for picking up wickets with the new ball, had claimed 290 international wickets, so far, during his career. As the deadline for the political parties to conclude electioneering for the February 8 general polls ended on Tuesday midnight, the election campaigns underway across the country culminated with promises of better education, employment, and economic system for the country. With less than 24 hours left for the political contest to begin, Pakistan will witness one of the most crucial general elections in its history with over 128 million registered voters - half of the country's population - to decide the fate of the nation for the next five years. Amid a challenging security situation across the country, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is determined to ensure the peaceful conduct of polls in the presence of increased security with the Pakistan Army, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs), and police on high alert. As the country heads into the country's 10th general elections after more than five years, the masses hope for a change in the economy as analysts say the elected



government will need to have a collaborative effort from policymakers, businesses, and citizens alike to address economic challenges, and foster growth. - DNA

## ECP sets up 90,675 polling stations...

FROM PAGE 01  
14036 polling stations for women have been established in Punjab. While the number of joint polling stations for men and women in the province is 22,352. Sindh: The total number of polling stations in Sindh is 19006. However, there are 40443 polling stations are reserved for men and 40313 polling stations for women have been specified in Sindh. The number of combined polling stations for men and women in Sindh is 10,250. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A total of 15,697 polling stations have been established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while the number of polling station reserved for men and women are 4,810 and 4,286 respectively. ECP has established 6,610 joint polling stations for men and women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Balochistan: Hamas proposes 3-stage plan for, hostage releases

## Hamas proposes 3-stage...

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the group in exchange for Israel setting free 1,500 Palestinian detainees, the source said. "The 1st stage of the possible Gaza deal includes the entry of no fewer than 500 aid trucks, the return of displaced people and free movement across Gaza," the source added. The Palestinian group also demands that at least 60,000 temporary homes and 200,000 tents be allowed to enter the enclave during the first stage, the source said. Hamas' response also calls for halting Israeli settler incursions into the flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem and the return to the pre-2002 status, under which settlers were not allowed to perform rituals at the site. "Hamas conditioned concluding negotiations on ending the war before the end of the second stage," the source added.

## 'No diplomatic ties with...

FROM PAGE 01  
obtaining their legitimate rights. "The Kingdom has communicated its firm position to the US administration that there will be no diplomatic relations with Israel unless an independent Palestinian state is recognized on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital," the statement said. The official note addressed comments attributed to US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby, without outlining his remarks. Reuters reported on Tuesday that "Kirby said that the Biden administration has received positive feedback that Saudi Arabia and Israel are willing to continue to have normalization discussions." The Saudi statement also demanded "Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip stops and all Israeli occupation forces withdraw from the Gaza Strip." The Kingdom called on permanent members of the UN Security Council to "expedite the recognition of the Palestinian state."

## Border with Afghan-Iran to remain...

FROM PAGE 01  
Officials said both countries were informed about the decision of Pakistan. The border crossings with Afghanistan at Torkham and Chaman were frequently shut in the recent past due to tensions between the two countries. However, the border with Iran remained open last month when both countries were involved in tit-for-tat missile exchanges. Around 128 million voters are set to go to the polls on Thursday to elect members of the national assembly and four provincial assemblies. Security has been beefed up ahead of crucial polling with the deployment of army troops. Almost half of over 90,000 polling stations nationwide have been declared sensitive. Many polling stations in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa have been identified as highly sensitive.

## PSL 9 ticket booking website under cyber attack

As per the details, the technical team is solving the cyber attack on the website



OUR CORRESPONDENTS

ISLAMABAD: The management of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) has confirmed that the online ticket booking platform for season nine has been hit by a cyber attack. As per the details, the technical team is solving the cyber attack on the website. "There has

been a cyberattack on the PSL 9 ticketing website (pcb.tcs.com.pk). Technical team of the ticketing partners are addressing the issue with efficiency. We anticipate a swift resolution and expect the website of the service provider to be operational again shortly." PSL updated from their social platforms Remember, the tickets had to go on sale

from February 6 at 5:00 pm but now it has been delayed due to the cyber-attack. On the other hand, physical tickets have been made mandatory for all PSL 9 matches. E-tickets (self-printed or digital copies) will not be accepted for entry across the four venues throughout the tournament. Physical tickets will go on sale at designated TCS express centres from February 12 2024 onwards. Tickets booked online can also be collected from designated pick-up centres or can be home-delivered by the courier. The opening ceremony and first match of the ninth edition of the PSL is scheduled to take place on February 17 at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore.

The tickets have been set at PKR 6,000 (VIP), PKR 3,000 (Premium), PKR 2,000 (First class) and PKR 1,000 (General). The tickets for the final, to be played on March 18 at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi, have been set at PKR 8,000 (VIP), PKR 4,000 (Premium), PKR 2,500 (First class) and PKR 1,000 (General). The tickets for the qualifier will be sold for PKR 5,000 (VIP), PKR 2,500 (Premium), PKR 1,500 (First class) and PKR 750 (General) while tickets for the two eliminators have been priced at PKR 5,000 (VIP), PKR 3,000 (Premium), PKR 1,500 (First class) and PKR 750 (General). Throughout PSL 9, Karachi

will host 11 matches including the final leg of the tournament, Rawalpindi and Lahore will host nine matches each while Multan will host five matches. Enclosure details: Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore VIP - Imran Khan and Fazal Mahmood Premium - Rajas and Saeed Anwar First Class - Javed Miandad, AH Kardar, Sarfaraz Nawaz and Abdul Qadir General - Majid Khan, Inzamam-ul-Haq, Nazar, Qaid, Imtiaz Ahmed, Zaheer Abbas, Hanif Mohammad and Saeed Ahmed Multan Cricket Stadium, Multan VIP - Imran Khan, Fazal Mahmood Premium - Zaheer Abbas,

Javed Miandad First Class - Elahi Brothers, Wasim Akram General - Hanif Mohammad, Mushtaq Ahmed Pindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi VIP - Imran Khan, Javed Akhtar, Javed Miandad and Azhar Mahmood Premium - Shoaib Akhtar, Sohail Tanvir, Miran Buksh and Yasir Arafat National Bank Stadium, Karachi VIP - Fazal Mahmood, Hanif Mohammad, Javed Miandad Premium - Imran Khan, Qaid, Wasim Akram First Class - Asif Iqbal, Intikhab Alam, Iqbal Qasim, Mohammad Brothers, Nasimul Ghani, Zaheer Abbas General - Majid Khan, Waqar Hasan, Wasim Bari.



## Briefs

## Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan MFAs hold telephone conversation

BAKU : Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeyhun Bayramov and newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan Murat Nurtleu, had a telephone conversation on February 7. According to the press service department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jeyhun Bayramov congratulated his colleague on his reappointment as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan and wished him success in his future activities. Speaking with satisfaction about the current agenda of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, the Minister expressed confidence that relations based on friendship, brotherhood, and solidarity between the two countries will continue to develop in an upward direction. Various aspects of strategic partnership relations between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, including the current situation in the region, were discussed during the telephone conversation.—DNA

## IAEA delegation arrives at Zaporizhzhia

MOSCOW: A delegation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) headed by Director-General Rafael Grossi arrived at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) on Wednesday, Russian news agency TASS said. The delegation's 12 vehicles accompanied by military police passed the Russian checkpoint near the city of Vasylivka. Grossi met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other officials in Kyiv on Tuesday. According to the agency, the visit to the plant is meant "to discuss and assess important issues and recent developments related to the still fragile nuclear safety and security situation at the site, including the reduced number of staff working at this major facility." The Zaporizhzhia NPP, the biggest in Europe and among the 10 largest in the world, has been under Russian control since early 2022.—Agencies

## Japanese firm ends pact with Israeli company

TOKYO: A defense firm in Japan halted its strategic cooperation agreement with an Israeli military tech company following the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling last month, urging the country to prevent genocide in Gaza. "We have currently suspended any new activities related to the memorandum of understanding and plan to terminate the memorandum by the end of February," said Hachimura Tsuyoshi, the chief financial officer of Itochu Aviation, regarding their agreement with Elbit Systems. The partnership was established at the request of the Japanese Defense Ministry as deemed necessary for national security and Japan's Self-Defense Forces, he told an earnings press conference. On the Jan. 26 world court ruling, Hachimura said Tokyo supports the court's role and thus is cutting off the pact this month. In March 2023, Itochu signed a strategic cooperation memorandum of understanding with Elbit Systems, an Israeli military technology and defense equipment manufacturer. Companies under the umbrella of Itochu Corp. have overseas investments in various sectors, including energy, finance, defense, chemistry, communication, food, textiles and construction. The U.N. court on Jan. 26 found South Africa's claim that Israel is committing genocide plausible. The court issued an interim order urging Israel to stop obstructing aid deliveries into Gaza and to improve the humanitarian situation. The statement noted that an international team was formed to follow Israeli crimes committed in Gaza.—APP



ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar in a group photo with the Chairman and members of Royal Foundation of Gilgit Baltistan.—DNA

## UNSC states call on Russia to withdraw from Ukraine

The West took Ukraine's side, imposed heavy sanctions on Russia, and has been providing unprecedented economic, humanitarian, and economic assistance to Kyiv ever since

## NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Several UN Security Council member countries on Tuesday called on Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine, as the war will enter its third year later this month. "We renew our calls for Russia to immediately withdraw its forces from Ukraine's internationally recognized borders," Robert Wood, deputy permanent representative of the US to the UN, told a UN Security Council meeting on threats to international peace and security. "We do know this: The Kremlin bears full responsibility for the unconscionable death and destruction brought about as a consequence of (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine, in violation of the UN Charter," he said. Russia

demanded the council meeting after 28 people were killed in Saturday's attack on a bakery in the Russian-controlled Luhansk region. Moscow described the shelling as a "terrorist attack" by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Stressing that Russia continues its "relentless attacks" against Ukraine, Wood said Moscow's "aggression against Ukraine is a blatant violation" of the UN Charter and of Ukraine's territorial integrity. UK's Political Coordinator at the UN Fergus Eekersley said thousands of people have been killed in the 700 days since Russia's "barbaric invasion" of Ukraine began. "It is Russia alone that is responsible for the destruction caused by this war," Eekersley said, accusing Moscow of violating the UN Charter. "The quickest path to peace is for President Putin to end his illegal invasion.

We repeat our call for Russia to respect the UN Charter and to withdraw its forces from Ukraine," he added. Riccarda Chanda, deputy permanent representative of Switzerland to the UN, said the Ukrainian people continue to suffer the "devastating consequences" of the war. "We condemn this grave violation of international law and reiterate that Russia must withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory in order to put an end to this aggression," she said. Shino Mitsuko, Japan's deputy permanent representative to the UN, said Russia should "correct its violations" of the UN Charter, take responsibility, and use its power for the benefit of the entire world. "Japan once again urges Russia to stop its aggression and immediately and unconditionally withdraw from the entire internationally recognized territory of

Ukraine. "Japan will continue to stand with Ukraine as long as it takes," she said. Russian envoy to the UN Vassily Nebenzia, for his part, said they called an urgent meeting of the council with regard to the missile strike by Ukraine against Lysychansk that took place on Saturday. "I bet that today we will hear allegations that Russia convenes UNSCs on various aspects of the Ukrainian crisis way too often. "However, we are not the ones who come up with the reasons for the meetings. It is Ukrainian fighters who have become so brutal and brazen that they commit terrorist attacks almost weekly, shelling civilian infrastructure and killing civilians on Russian territory," he said, adding that this is the fourth "terrorist attack of this kind" in the past six weeks. The Ukrainian armed forces feel

"total impunity and permissiveness," according to the Russian envoy. "What's more, they feel the unconditional support of Washington, London and Brussels, who do not care about the killings of civilians, broken families and ruined lives," he said. Criticizing the US and the EU for their support to Ukraine, Nebenzia said the lethal weapons that are sent to Ukraine "are utilized to commit terrorist acts against peaceful people and civilian infrastructure in violation of international humanitarian law." Russia launched its "special military operation" in Ukraine in February 2022. The West took Ukraine's side, imposed heavy sanctions on Russia, and has been providing unprecedented economic, humanitarian, and economic assistance to Kyiv ever since.

## Harvard faces US govt probe over discriminating against Muslims

WASHINGTON: Harvard University is facing a government investigation for possible discrimination following a civil rights complaint filed by Arab and Muslim students, according to media reports. Since the start of the Israel-Hamas conflict last October, more than 60 investigations by the US Department of Education have been launched into K-12 schools, colleges, and universities over allegations of discrimination related to shared ancestry, ABC News reported. "We support the work of the Office of Civil Rights to ensure students' rights to access educational programs are safeguarded and will work with the office to address their questions," Jason Newton, spokesman for the Ivy League school, told the outlet. The Muslim Legal Fund of America, which lodged the complaint on behalf of the students in January, claims that students have faced "rampant harassment and racist attacks including doxing, stalking and assault simply for being Palestinian, Muslim, and supporters of Palestinian rights." The group also said certain students have been subjected to assault due to their wearing keffiyehs, the traditional Palestinian scarves. "Our complaint addresses Harvard's failure to protect more than a dozen students from harassment, intimidation, and threats based solely on their status as Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and supporters of Palestinian rights," the legal fund said. "This investigation signifies an important step toward accountability and justice for these students, who all deserve the right to learn in a safe environment and the freedom to express their views," it added.

## Farmers' protests block traffic across Spain

OVIEDO: Farmers in Spain continued nationwide protests on Wednesday, blocking key roads and food distribution centers while winning more concessions from the government. In parliament, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced that Madrid will reinforce the "food chain law" to ensure farmers are not forced to sell food below production costs. He also announced that Spain would implement "mirror" clauses in imports to guarantee that produce entering the market complies with EU standards. "What banned products do imported oranges contain? What labor rights are in those countries? What type of fuel do they use? Consumers don't know but it should be

clear," protesting Catalan rice farmer Dani Forcadell told El Pais. "This production isn't coming from small farmers, it's international companies that exploit the people and their land to exploit the market here." Sanchez said he would lobby for the simplification of the bureaucracy of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, which is another major gripe of the protesters. But some of the biggest problems are also at a more local level. In Catalonia, for instance, where around 1,000 tractors are driving toward central Barcelona, threatening to block the major access points, some farmers are outraged by water restrictions due to the drought. In a statement, a farmers' union from the

Baix Llobregat county said the regional government's drought measures are "temporary band-aids that do not solve the problem in the mid to long term." They are calling for immediate investments in different water resources, modernization and slam the "fraudulent abuse" of hydro resources by state-backed power companies. Most of the disruptive protests have been organized outside of the three main farmers' unions, which have also called for mobilizations. In Catalonia, the lines of tractors have not been authorized, but daily La Vanguardia reported that they plan to leave the tractors blocking the main entrances of Barcelona this afternoon while farmers

march to meet government officials. A meeting is scheduled with Catalan President Pere Aragonés on Wednesday afternoon. "We might just stay here because they never solve anything, they never have," Joan Carles, a spokesperson for a Valles farmers union told El Pais. "They put us on the back so we'll go home. But we won't move until they improve the situation and guarantee help for the sector, which is dying." Elsewhere in Spain, around 400 tractors blocked the highway in La Rioja; anti-riot police intervened in a protest in Leon; and in Malaga the government announced it would be fining around 400 protesters for non-sanctioned protests.—Agencies

## Sweden shuts Nord Stream probe over lack of jurisdiction

STOCKHOLM: A Swedish prosecutor probing the 2022 sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipelines linking Russia and Germany said Wednesday he was closing the investigation because Sweden does not have jurisdiction.

Mats Ljungqvist said there had been "in-depth cooperation" with Germany over the September 2022 seabed operation and he would "hand over material that can be used as evidence in the German investigation." Four large gas leaks

were discovered on Nord Stream's two pipelines off the Danish island of Bornholm, with seismic institutes recording two underwater explosions just before. The pipelines had been at the centre of geopolitical tensions as

Russia cut gas supplies to Europe in suspected retaliation for Western sanctions over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. While the leaks were in international waters, two were in Denmark's exclusive economic zone and two in Sweden's.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Norway called on Foreign Minister Jilil Abbas Jillani on Wednesday.—DNA

## 90 detained after terror attack in Istanbul

## FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA: The number of suspects detained in the aftermath of a terror attack in Istanbul by the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C) rose to 90 as of Wednesday. Two assailants were shot dead when they fired upon police officers at a security checkpoint outside the massive courthouse complex in the Çalayan neighborhood on Istanbul's European side. A female passerby was killed in the attack while several, including police officers, were injured. Media reports say terrorists identified as S.Y. and P.B. were planning to broadcast their attack live if they managed to enter the courthouse. They were stopped at the checkpoint, however, when police were suspicious of them and sought to search the duo. Security camera footage emerged after the attack showed the assailants producing weapons in front of the checkpoint and indiscriminately firing. The attack took place as P.B.'s sister was standing trial inside the courthouse on terror charges. The broadcaster A Haber reported on Tuesday that a search of two assailants found one of them had a device attached to a cellphone for a live broadcast of their actions. One of them was also wearing a T-shirt with a slogan of a terrorist group. News agencies said 48 bullets, a large number of plastic handcuffs and pepper spray were also found in possession of the terrorists. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya had initially announced that 40 people were arrested in

connection with the attack in the immediate aftermath of the shooting. Both assailants served time on charges of membership of a terrorist group in the past but they were apparently not involved in any acts of terrorism before. E.Y. was most recently sentenced to seven years and six months in prison eight months ago but appealed the ruling. He was released with a travel ban and judiciary control. P.B. was questioned by police in the past on suspicion of DHKP-C membership and was recently released from prison. Media outlets reported that P.B. complained of prison conditions and her letters were repeatedly made public by a lawmaker of a party associated with the PKK, another terrorist group whose ideology is similar to the DHKP-C. The DHKP-C was at the forefront when the notorious Gezi Park protests of 2013 escalated into deadly riots, and members of the group participated in the riots. Some suspects imprisoned for links to the terrorist group have drawn support for their release by lawmakers of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). A CHP lawmaker was among those calling for the release of E.Y. when the latter was imprisoned. "Yesterday's attack proved once more that the CHP is the staunch defender of those terrorists. Some CHP lawmakers even filed a motion in Parliament (for the improvement of prison conditions for terrorists). The CHP is a friend of the political wing of the terrorist group," Erdo an said in a speech in the southeastern province of Sanlurfa on Wednesday.

## IMF warns of Maldives foreign debt crisis

COLOMBO: The strategically-placed Indian Ocean nation of the Maldives, which has borrowed heavily from China and shifted allegiance from India, is at high risk of "debt distress," the IMF warned Wednesday. Beijing has pledged more funding for the Maldives since pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu took power in November. Muizzu thanked China last month for its "selfless assistance" for development funds after a visit to Beijing. The International Monetary Fund did not give details of the Maldives' foreign debt but said there was a need for "urgent policy adjustment". "Without significant policy changes, the overall fiscal deficits and public debt are projected to stay elevated," the IMF said after a review of the country's economy. "The Maldives remains at high risk of external and overall debt distress". The archipelago, famed for its white sand beaches and where tourism accounts for nearly a third of the economy, has recovered economically from the Covid-19 pandemic. But while a planned airport expansion and an increase in hotels are projected to boost growth, the IMF said "uncertainty surrounding the outlook remains high and risks are tilted to the downside." Muizzu's mentor, former president Abdullah Yameen, who ruled for five years until 2018, borrowed heavily from Beijing for construction projects. That left it owing 42 percent of its more than \$3 billion foreign debt to China in 2021, according to the World Bank, citing the Maldives' finance ministry.—APP

## Rome partially restores Trajan's Basilica

ROME: The restoration of a portion of the Basilica Ulpia, which soared above the ancient Italian city for over a millennia, helps bring to life the grandeur and magnificence of the original marble monument. While most work on Rome's ubiquitous ruins points downwards, the rebuilding of the basilica's two-storey Corinthian colonnade has brought the focus up — over 23 metres to be exact. "If visitors can't sense the height of the monuments, they won't understand the meaning of the architecture," Claudio Parisi Presicce, Rome's top official for cultural heritage, told AFP on a tour of the site. The Basilica Ulpia was the centrepiece of Trajan's Forum, the largest and last of the imperial forums, named after Marcus Ulpius Traianus, emperor from 98 to 117 AD. Inaugurated in the second century, it mostly collapsed during the Middle Ages, but was unearthed by excavations in the early 19th century and 1930s. The current project, which began in 2021, identified three green marble columns that had been left for nearly 100 years.—Agencies



## Briefs

### ECP rejects Akram's plea for PTI affiliation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has rejected Salman Akram Raja's plea for declaring his affiliation with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. The ECP released its reserved verdict on Raja's plea, with DG Law Saima Janjua delivering the decision. The commission has reserved its verdict against PTI candidate Raja's plea, seeking to be declared a PTI candidate rather than an independent candidate on Feb 2. Salman Akram Raja filed the plea to avoid being declared an independent candidate and instead be recognised as a PTI candidate on Form-33, which contains the names and details of contesting candidates. Currently, Raja is not listed as a PTI candidate on Form-33. Consequently, he will now contest the election from NA-128 as an independent candidate, with electoral symbol 'Racket'. The ECP clarified that it did not grant the electoral symbol to the PTI, a decision that was upheld by the Supreme Court. The PTI failed to demonstrate in the Supreme Court that intra-party elections were fairly conducted.

### 1,500 inmates in Punjab jails cast votes

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Approximately 1,500 prisoners exercised their right to vote via postal ballot papers in various prisons across Punjab on Wednesday. According to reports, out of the 65,000 inmates incarcerated in Punjab's 43 prisons, nearly 1,500 participated in the electoral process through postal ballots. Mian Farooq Nazeer, the Punjab Prisons IG, confirmed that these inmates were deemed eligible to vote. He said the voting process was closely monitored through cameras, and subsequently, the postal ballots were forwarded to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The ECP had formally requested the chief of Punjab Prisons to facilitate voting for prisoners via postal ballots.

### Show-cause notice issued to Daniyal

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has issued a show-cause notice to former federal minister Daniyal Aziz, an independent candidate from NA-75 Narowal for the general elections 2024 over 'violation' of the Code of Conduct (CoC). According to details, the ECP fixed the hearing of the case on February 10 and in the case of Daniyal Aziz's victory in the election, the notification of his triumph will be subjected to the ECP's final decision. According to the District Monitoring Officer's report, Daniyal Aziz is repeatedly violating the code of conduct. The report said that Daniyal Aziz did not appear before the ECP or respond to the earlier notices. According to the report, Rs50,000 fine was also imposed on him. It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz's leader had decided to contest election 2024 as an independent candidate after having differences with the party. Daniyal Aziz came into limelight after PML-N issued a show-cause notice to him for 'violating' party rules by posting controversial tweets on X, formerly Twitter, and a statement on TV channel holding his own party leader Ahsan Iqbal responsible for hike in prices.

# Germany provides EUR 45 million support to Pakistan

Ambassador Alfred Grannas: "The German-Pakistani development cooperation has left its footprints in the country. With the agreement we signed today, we aim to continue our joint path towards a sustainable future in Pakistan"



### STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Kazim Niaz, Secretary for Economic Affairs Pakistan, and Mr. Alfred Grannas, German Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, witnessed the ceremony for signing of Euro 45 million agreements on Technical Development

Cooperation for starting new bilateral cooperation projects. These new agreements are the result of a longstanding and trustful partnership between the two countries. The newly commissioned projects align with the German development cooperation thematic areas of Climate and energy, just transition; Sustainable economic development, training and employment; Health,

social protection and population policy. All ongoing and new projects work hand in hand with a holistic approach building synergies for well-rounded solutions to effectively tackle complex and global challenges like climate change and inclusion of vulnerable groups such as women and youth. Both parties highlighted the immense efforts taken in the past decades. The impact

of the German development cooperation is proof for a successful cooperation targeting the development sectors in need. Germany stands Shana bashana with Pakistan. Ambassador Alfred Grannas: "The German-Pakistani development cooperation has left its footprints in the country. With the agreement we signed today, we aim to continue our joint path towards a sustainable future in Pakistan. Recently Svenja Schulze, our German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, said 'international cooperation doesn't just help others. Above all, it helps us, because global problems can only be solved together'. Secretary Dr. Kazim Niaz: "We deeply appreciate the strong support that we have received on technical development cooperation. It would contribute to plugging some gaps in contributing to the Socio-economic development of the country". The German development cooperation has been supporting Pakistani Government initiatives for over 60 years. We work together with our partners in support of their socio-economic reform agenda contributing to a sustainable, crisis-proof development. Therefore, the cooperation focuses on the core areas of 'Climate and energy, just transition', 'Sustainable economic development, training and employment', and 'Health, social protection and population policy'. Our work contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and are implemented in line with the Pakistan-German cooperation agreements.

### William fills royal void during Charles cancer treatment

AGENCIES

LONDON: With his father King Charles III undergoing cancer treatment and his wife recovering from surgery, Britain's Prince William found himself thrust back to the frontline of royal duties on Wednesday. The king's shock cancer diagnosis, announced on Monday, and Catherine's abdominal operation have left William, 41, shouldering a heavy royal burden. Charles's eldest son and heir to the throne, William postponed public engagements to care for his wife, the Princess of Wales, and their three children after she was admitted to hospital on January 16. But on Wednesday he was back on duty, hosted an investiture ceremony at Windsor Castle, west of London, handing out honors for citizens recognized for their community work and other good deeds. It had been three weeks since he last appeared at a major royal event. Later, he will attend a London Air Ambulance fundraising gala. Charles, who left London on Tuesday for his Sandringham residence in eastern England, will meanwhile hold his weekly meeting with Prime Minister Sunak by telephone for a change.

# US-led forces will ultimately end its 'mission': Iraqi PM

NEWS DESK

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani says the US-led military coalition purportedly formed to fight the Daesh terrorist group will eventually wind down its presence in the Arab country. Speaking in an interview with the al-Arabiya television news network, Sudani stated that the Western alliance's mission will end at the Baghdad government's official request. "The main purpose of winding down US-led military coalition's mission is to eliminate all possible pretexts for attacks on its advisors," he said. Sudani also censured the US military's latest airstrikes against positions manned by anti-terror resistance groups in the western part of the country close to the border with Syria, asserting, "Any kind of military attack on the Iraqi territory is unacceptable." He said Iraq has not had any contact with the United States following the aerial assaults. The Iraqi prime minister also noted that the withdrawal of US-led foreign forces from the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region is among the issues raised in the course of negotiations between Baghdad and Washington to remove the troops from the country. "The Iraqi government has come up with a formula, under which the [resistance] groups will stop their [retaliatory] attacks in exchange for the cessation of American offensives."

# Ji emerged as most popular party of Karachi: analysts

Senior journalists, analysts acknowledge Ji's strong political strategies attracting Karachiites

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Analysts declared the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) as the most popular party of Karachi — the provincial capital of Sindh — ahead of the nationwide elections set to take place on February 8. The politico-religious party has left behind its previous political pattern of joining hands with multi-party alliances following bitter experiences and decided to contest local and nationwide polls on its own election symbol "scale" (tarazu) in a bid to return to its original status and separate identity. A private news channel aired a special transmission related to the election 2024 in which some of the renowned journalists, political analysts and anchorpersons including Hamid Mir, ShahzebKhanzada, Shahzad Iqbal, Suhail Warracha and Irshad Bhatti acknowledged JI and its Karachi chief Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman's performance and political movements.



ISLAMABAD: Senator Vladimir Chizhov, Head of the Pakistan-Russia Friendship Group of the Russian Federation Council, callson Foreign Minister Jali Abbas Jilani. Senator Chizhov is visiting Pakistan as an International Observer for the general elections being held today. — DAN

# Humanitarian disaster looms over Rafah

FOREIGN DESK

RAFAH: Concern is growing as an Israeli ground invasion of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip is imminent, with the situation in the city near the Egyptian border getting more intense by the hour amid the occupying regime's genocidal war. There were sounds of explosions in Rafah as Israeli gunboats opened fire at the main coastal road to the west of Rafah on Wednesday, while massive airstrikes were reported in the city, which had been called the safe zone in the strip. Israeli strikes overnight have left eleven people dead, including a journalist and his mother and sister. Israel says its tanks and troops would imminently press into Rafah, and continue until the military has "full reign" over the entire 42-km-long territory. Gazan families and medics in Rafah — the last refuge for Palestinians within Gaza — have warned of humanitarian catastrophe if Israeli troops push into the border town. Displaced Palestinians crowded into tents in Rafah are fearfully waiting for an anticipated Israeli ground invasion with nowhere left to flee once the regime's troops move in. Kareem Dahman, a displaced Palestinian in the city described the conditions in Rafah as "very difficult," saying "They hear (drones) very, very loud, and we hear the sounds of bombing at night."

# Pak-Russia Friendship Group head calls on FM

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Senator Vladimir Chizhov, the head of the Pakistan-Russia Friendship Group of the Russian Federation Council on Wednesday called on caretaker Foreign Minister Jali Abbas Jilani and discussed matters relating to mutual concern. Senator Chizhov is visiting Pakistan as an international observer for the general elections being held tomorrow (Feb 8). During the meeting, the foreign minister underscored Pakistan's commitment to free and fair elections and explained the electoral process and security arrangements for holding peaceful and transparent elections. He also reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthen Pakistan-Russia bilateral cooperation for mutual benefit of the peoples of the two countries.

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