



# Islamabad POST

Thursday, February 15, 2024

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

**Indonesian ex-general Prabowo Subianto leads in presidential race**

Detailed News On Page-08

**Marwat claims Zardari contact, PPP denies**

Detailed News On Page-08



**Babar maintains supremacy in ODI rankings**

Detailed News On Page-06



**Hints at talks with PTI**

## JUI (F) rejects elections results

If Establishment thinks elections are fair then it means its (Army) May 9 narrative is buried; refuses to join hands with PML N or PPP in the National Assembly

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Chief of JUI F Maulana Fazl ur Rehman has hinted at talks with the PTI saying the elections 2024 were badly rigged. He said if the Establishment thinks that the elections were free and fair then it means the narrative build by the Establishment is dead and buried. He said the Establishment should withdraw from politics. If they do so, we will extend all love and affection to them. But if they will do politics then we will respond in the political language. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) Emir Maulana Fazlur Rehman has said that if the establishment deems the February 8 elections to be fair, then the "narrative" of May 9 has been "buried" – as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed candidates secured the most seats in the National Assembly.

PICTURE ON BACK PAGE

PTI workers and leaders were rounded up post-May 9 – the day when party founder Imran Khan was arrested in a graft case. During the nearly countrywide protests, the miscreants targeted the civil and military installations including – Jinnah House and the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi. The military had termed May 9 "Black Day" and decided to try the protesters under the Army Act. Subsequently, an exodus was witnessed after the unprecedented incident and later on, the party faced several setbacks. However, the PTI-affiliated candidates emerged victorious despite scepticism. After projected "unofficial" election results, major parties including – Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) – swung into action to form coalitions to form their governments in the Centre and provinces. However, the politico-religious party formally announced to stay away from joining any coalition whose supreme headed the former ruling coalition – Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a multi-party alliance – which ousted former prime minister Imran Khan via a parliamentary vote in 2022.

Continued on Page 06

## JI rules out alliance with PTI

Baloch says PTI had formed a coalition with another party at the federal level

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Jamat-e-Islami (JI) on Wednesday ruled out the possibility of forging an alliance with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), whose independent candidates are leading with the higher number of seats in the February 8 general elections, to form a government in the centre. JI's Central Naib Amir Liaqat Baloch, while speaking to a private news channel, said that his party has decided that it would not join hands with the PTI as it had formed a coalition with another party at the federal level. "There is no reason for us to form an alliance with PTI only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," said Baloch, adding that talks with PTI were related to both governments – federal and provincial. On the other hand, PTI leader Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said that there was no use in forming an alliance with JI as the party did not have any representation in the provincial assembly. Speaking to media, Saif said that the PTI had been holding talks with JI only on a provincial level. He added that his party was looking into the legal procedures regarding the formation of government. PTI's leadership appears conflicted about their views on talks with other political parties on forming a government in Islamabad as Khan brushed off any possibility of talks with other political

Continued on Page 06

## HANGOVER submarine introduced

Submarine is a result of Pak-China defence agreement

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Achieving another milestone in indigenous submarine development project at Pakistan, the Keel Laying Ceremony of second HANGOR Class Submarine was held at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works (KS&EW). Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf graced the occasion as Chief Guest. As per the defence agreement between Pakistan and China for development of 08 x HANGOR Class Submarines, 04 submarines are under construction at Wu-chang Shipbuilding Industry in China whereas remaining 04 are being built at KS&EW under Transfer of Technology (ToT) agreement. This is the 2nd Submarine to undergo Keel Laying at KS&EW. Earlier, in Dec 2022, Keel Laying of first Submarine was successfully undertaken and currently it is at advanced stage.



KARACHI: Officials of Pak Navy, Karachi Shipyard and China Shipbuilding & Offshore Intl signing the milestone certificate during keel laying ceremony of 6th HANGOR Class Submarine at Karachi Shipyard. – DNA

## NA session to be summoned as per law: Solangi

President could convene the NA session within 21 days

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday said that the inaugural session of the new National Assembly would be summoned in accordance with the law. "I need to sign the summary for the NA session as I also hold the portfolio of Minister for the Parliamentary Affairs," Solangi said while responding to the queries of media-persons regarding the procedure for the summoning of new National Assembly, outside the Election Commission of Pakistan. The minister said in accordance with the law the ECP was required to issue official results within 14 days of the elections. As per the Constitution, he stated, the president could convene the National Assembly's session within 21 days of the polling date. "The last date for convening the NA session is February 29 and it can be summoned on any day before it," Solangi said that any member of the National Assembly could contest the elections for the positions of prime minister, speaker and deputy speaker. To a query, he said legal forums were available for redressal of grievances regarding elections and justice should prevail if any violations were committed.

## Nawaz sacrifices PM slot for his daughter Maryam

The prevailing uncertainty surrounding the election results may have prompted Nawaz Sharif to reconsider his political position and thus not to present himself as the next prime minister of Pakistan

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif appears to have made a strategic move by relinquishing his prime ministership, potentially paving the way for his daughter, Maryam Nawaz, to be nominated for the Chief Minister position in Punjab. Analysts speculate that Nawaz's decision may have been influenced by advice to step back due to the contested nature of his election to the national assembly seat. There is a concern that an unfavorable decision could pose challenges for him. Another contributing factor to Nawaz Sharif's change of stance is the lackluster performance of the PML-N in the general elections. Preliminary reports suggest that the party secured only 30 to 40 seats. While these reports await confirmation, it is evident that a significant number of losing candidates have turned to the courts to challenge the election outcomes. The prevailing uncertainty surrounding the election results may have prompted Nawaz Sharif to reconsider his political position and thus not to present himself as the next prime minister of Pakistan. Over the course of history, the relationship between Nawaz Sharif and the Establishment has consistently proven to be tumultuous, marked by frequent conflicts that have led to the overthrow of Nawaz Sharif's government on three separate occasions, either through military intervention or judicial processes. Given this historical backdrop, the anticipation was high that the dynamics between these two entities would continue to be strained in the recent political scenario. It was foreseeable that the powers-that-were were inclined to keep Nawaz Sharif

away from the prime minister's office once again, considering the challenges and conflicts that had arisen in the past. This recurrent pattern suggested a deep-rooted difficulty in the coexistence of Nawaz Sharif and the Establishment. Even amidst uncertainties surrounding the amicable coexistence between Maryam Nawaz and the Establishment, given her historically assertive stance, it remains crucial to observe the trajectory of their relationship in the days ahead. The Sharif family, by retaining key positions, may face criticism, particularly concerning the concentration of power within their ranks. Notably, Aleem Khan, the IPP President and a candidate for the chief minister role, seems to have diminished prospects based on recent developments. The evolving political landscape demands a nuanced analysis of power dynamics and potential repercussions for both Maryam Nawaz and the broader political landscape. The dynamics between key figures and the distribution of roles within the Sharif family will undoubtedly be subject to scrutiny, shaping the narrative and perceptions in the coming days. The political pundits believe even if the PML N is able to form the governments at the federal and provincial level, it may not be a sustainable project and within two years or even before things would be driven to such a pass that either an in-house or through yet another ballot, the change would become imminent. The best option for the PMLN, as the political commentators opine, would have been offering PTI, the biggest party in terms of seats, to come forward and form the government. In case of their failure, then the PML N had taken on this onus.

## Briefs

**Six independent candidates join PML-N**

Independent candidates call on Maryam Nawaz

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Six independent candidates from Punjab decided on Wednesday to join the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The development came after the lawmakers called on PML-N Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz in Lahore. Prominent among those who joined the PML-N were Sultan Bajwa (PP-132 Nankana Sahib), Shazia Tareen (PP-225 Lodhran), Mehmood Qadir (PP-289), Hanif Pitaifi (PP-288 Dera Ghazi Khan), Taimoor Lali (PP-94), and Ali Asghar Gurmani (PP-283).

**'Nawaz isn't quitting politics'**

People had given a clear majority to Nawaz

DNA

LAHORE: PML-N Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz on Wednesday rejected the impression that three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif is leaving politics, saying he would actively participate in political activities and guide the party's government both in Centre and Punjab. "If not accepting the office of prime minister is construed as Nawaz Sharif quitting politics, then there is no truth in it," she said in a post shared on X – the social media platform previously known as Twitter. He would not only aggressively contribute to politics during the next five years but also act as a patron of the governments in Centre and Punjab, said Maryam who is the political scion of the elder Sharif and will now run Pakistan's most populace province.

## Violation of mandate

## CJP comes down hard on army over its businesses

Army should do its work and courts will do their job, remarks CJP Qazi Faez Isa

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa has sought assurance from the attorney general that the army would only work on defence-related matters and not run any business. The assurance was sought from CJP Isa during a hearing of a petition filed against commercial activity being done on military land. During the hearing, CJP Isa remarked that the army was conducting business and had set up marriage halls on military lands. He then sought assurance from the attorney general that the army would remain the "protector" and not do any business. "Can you get this assurance?" CJP Isa asked the attorney general. He also added that everyone should work as per their mandate. "The army should do its own work and courts will do their job," said CJP Isa. In response, AGP Mansoor Usman Awan stated that as per principle, everyone should do their job. However, CJP Isa insisted that if the AGP had the directives then he should give the assurance to the court.

Continued on Page 06

## CJP directs police to handle blasphemy cases 'diligently'

SC grants bail to blasphemy accused; says further investigation required in case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa directed the police on Wednesday to ensure that "religion is not used for personal purposes" and emphasised handling blasphemy cases "with diligence". A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Isa, and comprising Justice Musarrat Hilaali and Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar heard the case. The bench granted bail to blasphemy accused Zubair Sabri on a surety bond of Rs 50,000,

Continued on Page 06

## President Abbas urges Hamas to agree Gaza deal 'quickly'

President Abbas added that "we hold everyone responsible for placing any obstacles from any party to disrupt the deal, because things are no longer tolerable

NEWS DESK

RAMALLAH: The President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas has Wednesday called on Hamas movement to quickly complete a prisoner swap deal in order to protect Palestinian people and avoid an attack on Rafah city. "In the face of the comprehensive war being waged against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, we call on the Hamas movement to quickly complete prisoner swap deal to spare Palestinian people the scourge of another catastrophe with ominous consequences, no less dangerous than the Nakba of 1948, and to avoid the occupation's attack on the city of Rafah, which will lead to thousands of victims, suffering and displacement for our people," the President said.

Continued on Page 06

## Hamas heads to Cairo truce talks

FOREIGN DESK

GAZA STRIP: Negotiations to pause the Israel-Hamas war and free the remaining hostages headed into a second day in Cairo on Wednesday, as displaced Gazans braced for an expected Israeli assault on their last refuge of Rafah. A Hamas source told AFP that a delegation was headed to the Egyptian capital to meet Egyptian and Qatari mediators, after Israeli negotiators held talks with the mediators on Tuesday. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, an outspoken critic of Israel's conduct of the Gaza war, was also due in Cairo Wednesday for talks with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Continued on Page 06

FEBRUARY 2024

Pakistan's Premier News & Diplomatic Affairs Magazine

Find us on:

www.centrelines.com.pk

www.dnanews.com.pl

www.islamabadpost.com.pk

@Postislamabad/ @Editordnanews

A sister concern of

Islamabad POST

11# Block 18-A, Awan Plaza, G-8 Markez, Islamabad-Pakistan Ph: 051-2261960, 051-2266165



# KP's CM nominee Gandapur pledges to uplift province

He said the completion of the Chashma Right Bank Canal Project (CRBC) would enhance the agricultural produce and make the southern districts self-sufficient

DNA

DERA ISMAIL KHAN, :Ali Amin Gandapur, nominee for the slot of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's chief minister, on Wednesday, vowed to serve the people of the province regardless of any discrimination. Ali Amin Gandapur, who has been nominated by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, thanked his party's leadership for reposing trust in him and said that he would alleviate the problems of the masses. Gandapur, a former federal minister and member of the national and provincial assembly was elected in the

general elections 2024 as a member of the KP Assembly from PK-113, Dera Ismail Khan. Previously, he served as the Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan from 2018 to 2022. Before his stint at the federal level, Gandapur was a member of the KP's provincial assembly from 2013 to 2018. In the provincial assembly, he held the position of Provincial Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Revenue. In an exclusive interview with APP, he said he would work for the development of the entire province, unlike the past rulers who focused on their districts. He pointed out that the

newly-merged tribal districts lacked infrastructure and their development was a big challenge for them. He vowed to revive the Sehat Card programme in the province in a manner to help the poor and deserving people. Gandapur said the restoration of peace and maintenance of law and order was the top priority of the government. He said transparent and speedy completion of all developmental projects would be ensured. He said the completion of the Chashma Right Bank Canal Project (CRBC) would enhance the agricultural produce and make the southern districts self-sufficient.

# CDA addresses Islamabad water shortage with projects

ISLAMABAD: The water supply department of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) is working rapidly on several projects to meet the shortage of water in the city of Islamabad so that the citizens do not face any kind of difficulties during summer. In this regard, the annual cleaning work of Khanpur Canal has been started by the Water Supply Department of Capital Development Authority (CDA) which will be completed by the end of this month. Since water is supplied from Khanpur to the residents of Sectors G-10, G-11, F-10, F-11 and D-12 of Islamabad, and due to the annual cleaning campaign of Khanpur Canal,

the water supply should be reduced by 50% in these sectors. The shortage of water in these sectors will be fulfilled by Sangiani Water Works including Simli Dam. However, to ensure uninterrupted water supply to the residents before the arrival of summer, the cleaning work of the canal will be completed by the end of this month. After which water supply will be restored in the said sectors as per schedule. It should be noted that due to lack of sufficient rains in monsoon and winter, the water level in the dams has become very low. Due to lack of required rains, the amount of water in Khanpur Dam has reduced to 21% and in

Simli Dam to 50%. That is, 80% in Khanpur Dam and 50% in Simli Dam has been reduced. The Water Supply Wing has reduced the supply of water from Khanpur Dam by 60%, which means that instead of 10 million gallons, only 4 million gallons of water is being received daily. Moreover, during the cleaning campaign of Khanpur Canal, the tanker service was also alerted in the said sectors so that timely solved of the received complaints is possible in all circumstances. Residents of said sectors can also avail water tanker service by calling 9106580. Similarly, in view of the facilities of the citizens, the Water Supply Wing has also

issued a helpline number 0335775444 so that all possible facilities can be provided to the citizens. On this occasion, the administration of Capital Development Authority (CDA) while appreciating the steps taken by the water supply department, has asked that the steps taken for uninterrupted supply of water in the city should be accelerated. The Water Supply Department of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) has also appealed to the citizens to be careful in using water and avoid wastage of water so that maximum water can be used by the citizens.

# Director general calls for hydropower expansion in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD : Director General Hydropower, Private Power Infrastructure Board, Dr. Engineer Munawar Iqbal has said there is a need to harness the country's hydropower potential to add clean and green electricity to the national grid system for sustainable economic development. Pakistan has been blessed with huge resources for generating hydel and renewable energy (RE). The private sector should focus on investment in this sector in collaboration with the government. The Private Power Infrastructure Board is paying special attention to power generation from local resources, especially hydel, wind, and solar energy.

He expressed these views while talking to Acting President ICI Engineer Azhar Islam during a meeting at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry the other day. He said that Pakistani investors should come forward and take advantage of the immense opportunities for investment in clean and green energy. There are vast opportunities in the energy sector in Pakistan and investors should benefit from it. He said that his organization has so far successfully added over 18,000 megawatts (MW) of electricity to the national grid through Independent Power Producers (IPPs), which is about 50% of the total installed capacity.

He said that PPIB is providing one window facility to investors and lenders in this regard. He further said that at present the share of hydel in the energy mix is 25%, followed by solar energy with 6% and thermal with 69%. He further said that a target of 62% energy has been set through RE and hydel resources. We intend to increase the reliance on local resources, the target is to add more green energy to the system in the next 10 years. Acting President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Engineer Azhar Islam, while speaking on the occasion, said that the availability of cheap energy plays a key role in promoting

business and economic activities, but electricity generated from oil in Pakistan is very expensive for the business community. It has increased the cost of doing business manifold. Therefore, the government should pay special attention to increasing the share of hydropower in the total energy production, which will reduce the cost of production and facilitate business activities and exports. The Acting President said that Pakistan is mostly dependent on oil for power generation but due to the rising oil prices, this electricity has become very expensive and is a major reason for the increase in the cost of doing business in Pakistan. —APP



LAHORE : Federal Minister for IT and communication Dr. Umar Saif witnesses an MoU of treatment and prevention of Heart Attack between NHATI, PSIC, NITB.—DNA

# SCCI organises training seminar on SMEs

DNA

SIALKOT : A training seminar was organised at Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) to provide guidance and training to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). SMEs Committee of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chairman Faizan Akbar presided over the seminar. He informed the participants about lead generation and email marketing. He said that in this era of inflation, it had become very expensive for new and small exporters to travel globally for business. Therefore, they have to pay close attention to their email marketing, he said and added that the seminar was arranged for new entrepreneurs with the aim of providing them with guidance in the business field so that they move forward and expand their business not only for themselves but also for their homeland including Sialkot and play their role in development of the country by earning foreign exchange. He said it was his 152nd seminar and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry had always supported him in his work and that was the reason why I am doing my work in a better way. He also gave a presentation which was highly appreciated by the participants in the seminar. A large number of young entrepreneurs participated in the event.

# FPCCI, KhCCI join hands to enhance trade with Afghanistan

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and Khyber Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KhCCI) Wednesday joined hands to enhance bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This was agreed during a meeting between the Vice President, Aun Ali Syed and president KhCCI and other office bearers of both organizations here at FPCCI Regional Office. The meeting was attended by KCCI President Javad Hussain Kazmi, Vice President Zahirullah Shinwari,

and Member Syed Ali Hamad Kazmi. During the meeting, they expressed their commitment to work together to enhance bilateral trade between the two countries. Speaking on the occasion, Vice President of FPCCI, Aun Ali Syed said that increasing trade activities with neighboring countries was crucial for economic stability and strengthening relations. The KhCCI representatives congratulated the newly elected Vice President Aun Ali Syed and expressed their hope that his leadership would pave the way for resolving business community issues in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

They also exchanged suggestions for strengthening Pak-Afghan bilateral relations. Discussing the current economic situation, Aun Ali Syed emphasized the need for practical steps to address business community problems while promoting business activities. He observed that Pakistan and Afghanistan were brotherly Islamic countries and inherently interdependent on each other, therefore efforts would be made to stabilize their bilateral trade relations by the incoming governments, paving the way for uninterrupted trade between the two nations.

# KP Governor inaugurates IT lab at AUST

HAVELIAN : Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Haji Ghulam Ali on Wednesday inaugurated a free IT lab at Abbottabad University of Science and Technology (AUST) to foster technological education and promote sustainable practices. Addressing the gathering, Governor KP emphasized the significance of Free IT Labs in Fourth Generation Universities and applauded Abbottabad University's efforts to obtain projects in information technology from global countries. He advocated for educational systems that prioritize skill acquisition over job pursuit and stressed the importance of empowering youth in the present era. He further outlined plans to beautify the university's vacant land and enhance

its atmosphere by planting 10,000 trees. He underlined the importance of student involvement in the university's care and beautification efforts. He urged students to utilize information technology tools responsibly to shape a better future for themselves and society. Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Malik Mujaddad ur Rehman underscored the importance of nurturing talent and ability among the province's youth to empower them as valuable assets to the nation and society. During the event, it was revealed that AUST has generated approximately \$47,000 from various international-level projects in information technology. Furthermore,

nearly 400 deserving and underprivileged students have been provided scholarships that reflect the university's commitment to inclusive education. Dr. Rahman also highlighted the significant advancements including the resolution of the university's land issue and the complete elimination of the electricity bill through a \$9 million investment in solar energy. Following the inauguration, the Governor engaged with students in the IT lab and emphasized the acquisition of expertise in information technology. Commendation certificates were distributed to students for their projects, while faculty members received shields in recognition of their contributions.—APP

# Religious Minister offers short-term Hajj facility to pilgrims

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed has announced that this year's Hajj is set to be optimal for Pakistani pilgrims, offering unprecedented facilities. He introduced a short-term Hajj facility for the first time, marking a notable milestone in the nation's history. Addressing the start of the training session for pilgrims at Darul Hajj Camp on Wednesday, he announced that during Hajj, all women would receive Abayas, adorned with the Pakistani flag. Selected through a transparent system, the minister said fortunate pilgrims were chosen via a draw, and their training began on February 12. He said that Hajj pilgrims were the guests of Allah and a true ambassador of Pakistan, which would be facilitated with advance facilities. He said that when he took charge of the ministry, it was made clear that in 2024, Pakistani pilgrims would be provided with the best facilities. This year's Hajj would be exemplary for Pakistani pilgrims, offering facilities

that were not available in the past. The minister highlighted the comprehensive efforts made by the ministry regarding Hajj arrangements, collaborating with Saudi Arabia during a visit to assess the facilities, provided to pilgrims. He mentioned that accommodations, meals, and transportation, along with all basic necessities, had been standardised. While discussing transportation facilities for Pakistani pilgrims in Saudi Arabia, he said that this year, there would be provision of trains along with buses for pilgrims. Responding to a question, the minister said that for the first time in the country's history, a short-term Hajj facility is being provided in Pakistan. Every pilgrim would be given a green suit-case containing a QR code to prevent any loss of belongings. The Hajj pilgrims would also be provided with a free SIM containing 180 international calling minutes and 7GB data to facilitate easy communication with their loved-ones. Additionally, for the first time this year, women in Pakistan would receive free Abayas, adorned with the Pakistani flag, contributing to the country's identity.

اپنا کنبہ وسائل کے مطابق رکھنے کے لئے  
خاندانی منصوبہ بندی کے طریقے اپنائیں  
وطن کو خوشحالی کی راہ پر چڑھائیں  
خاندانی منصوبہ بندی۔ اولین ترجیح

چھوٹا خاندان  
خوشحال پاکستان کی ضمانت ہے،  
اپنا کنبہ اپنے وسائل کے مطابق رکھنے کے لئے خاندانی منصوبہ بندی کے موثر  
اور محفوظ طریقوں پر بھروسہ کرتے ہوئے استعمال کریں۔

متوازن خاندان۔۔۔ خوشحال پاکستان  
محکمہ بہبود آبادی، حکومت پنجاب  
Population Welfare Department Punjab | www.pwd.punjab.gov.pk | pwdpunjab

مشاورت اور تعلیمی خدمات کے لئے  
ہیلپ لائن: 1793

### 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

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

Feb 25/Kuwait

National Day

# FTO decides Rs 17,742.16 million refund claims

The Federal Tax Ombudsman briefed the President about FTO's overall performance and its key initiatives to facilitate taxpayers and expeditiously address their grievances against maladministration of tax officials. He stated that concerted efforts were undertaken to enhance FTO's outreach by launching awareness campaigns and opening up regional offices in the country

#### DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) has addressed the grievances of the taxpayers by processing 8,963 cases with an implementation status of 94.07% during 2023 as compared to 73.29% last year. Furthermore, requests for refund claims were also decided to the tune of Rs. 17,742.16 million in 2023 and the due amount was paid to the aggrieved taxpayers by the FBR. This was highlighted by the Federal Tax Ombudsman, Mr Asif Mahmood Jah, who called on President Dr Arif Alvi and presented FTO's Annual Report 2023, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

The Federal Tax Ombudsman briefed the President about FTO's overall performance and its key initiatives to facilitate taxpayers and expeditiously address their grievances against maladministration of tax officials. He stated that concerted efforts were undertaken to enhance FTO's outreach by launching awareness campaigns and opening up regional offices in the country. He informed that Honorary Advisors had also been appointed abroad to facilitate overseas Pakistanis in the USA, Canada, Sweden, UAE,



Hong Kong and the Philippines. He added that FTO had appointed leading businessmen as Honorary Advisors from various Chambers of Commerce and Industries to facilitate the business community. "To ensure prompt response against the maladministration of tax authorities, a mobile App has been developed enabling aggrieved complainants to lodge complaints and check their status

using mobile/smart devices", he stated. He apprised that highly informative training sessions had also been conducted to enhance the professional skills and expertise of Ombudsman institutions in the country.

While appreciating the performance of FTO, the President said that FTO had done an excellent job by processing a record number of cases and providing refunds worth Rs 17,742.16 million to taxpayers. He remarked that the institution of FTO needed to be further strengthened as it was providing free-of-cost and prompt justice to aggrieved taxpayers. He called for using the latest technology for seamless service delivery and timely disposal of taxpayers' complaints to improve the country's tax regime. He said that FTO had effectively contributed to promoting good governance in the country. It is worth stating that the FTO is a quasi-judicial forum, mandated to diagnose, investigate, redress and rectify any injustice or maladministration done to a person by the functionaries administering federal tax laws. It aims at enhancing the overall satisfaction of the taxpayers and strengthening their trust in the system.

### PTA Escalates Efforts to Combat Illegal SIM Activation

#### DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Zonal Office Sukhar, in close collaboration with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Circle, conducted a successful raid against a franchisee involved in the illicit activation of SIMs at Ratodero, district Larkana. During the raid, 25 Active SIMs were discovered. Furthermore, Franchise owner and one other Kiosk person was also taken in custody by FIA team. The recent raid is part of PTA's ongoing efforts to prevent the circumvention of the Multi-Finger Biometric Verification System (MBVS). This steadfast dedication underscores the Authority's resolve to combat the illicit issuance of SIM cards.

### Thematic design ideas for new banknote series to be submitted till March 11

ISLAMABAD: Director Finance of the State Bank Pakistan Qadir Bakhsh Wednesday said that SBP was organizing an art competition to develop innovative and thematic design ideas for new banknotes where local artists, designers and art students would submit their final designs by March 11. Talking to private news channel, he said that the final designs would be submitted to the federal government for approval and the process of issuing the new series of banknotes would involve a number of steps, adding, cash prizes would be awarded to top three entries in each of the current seven denominations. The director explained that after the art competition, the selected design ideas and themes would be shared with professional banknote designers chosen through a competitive process. These designers would then develop the final printable designs for each denomination, he said, adding, the completed designs were going to be submitted to the federal government for approval. --APP

## HEC Chairman lays foundation stone of central library at SABS

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Prof. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed on Wednesday laid the foundation stone of the Central Library at Shaheed Allah Bukhsh Soomro (SABS) University Jamshoro. He was welcomed by the Vice-Chancellor of SABS University Prof. Dr. Arabella Bhutto long with her team. Talking to chairpersons and other officials, he emphasized creating a conducive learning environment and promoting industry-academia collaboration. He assured of resolving financial constraints and providing

high-quality academic facilities at Shaheed Allah Bukhsh Soomro (SABS) University of Art, Design and Heritages, Jamshoro. Dr. Mukhtar directed that future appointments may be made purely on a temporary and pension-less to avoid burden. Dr. Arabella Bhutto informed to HEC Chairman about the special pay scale for fresh appointments already approved by SABS University. The HEC Chairman held a meeting with VC SABS, faculty members and administrative staff, where the matters related to enhancing education quality and current financial position of the University were discussed.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed expressed heartfelt appreciation for the remarkable efforts and dedication made by the SABS and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Arabella Bhutto in promoting and uplifting education as well as research quality on campus. He commended SABS as a leading art institution in higher education and emphasized having its own name, fame, and recognition throughout the globe in available resources. He praised Dr. Bhutto's exceptional leadership in driving the university toward excellence based on quality education, research, and

innovation. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed assured to provide financial, moral and technical support required by SABS University and aimed to enhance it further as the economic condition is stabilized overall. Earlier, he was briefed about financial matters, expenditures, fees structures, infrastructure, pension, and other related matters by Deputy Director Finance Asif Ali Shar. The Chairman was accompanied by Director HEC Javed Ali Memon and VC Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam Prof. Dr. Fateh Muhammad Mari. Vice Chancellor SABS Dr. Arabella Bhutto decorated the guests with traditional Ajrak and souvenirs. --APP

## Engineering community to have state-of-the-art 'Engineers Complex' soon

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) has planned to establish the first-ever Engineers Complex in Karachi with state-of-the-art facilities to prepare the engineering community to cope with the modern-day challenges. "PEC has purchased 11.4 acres of land in DHA city for the establishment of Engineers complex which will comprise of IT Tower, Engineering Academy, Engineers Club and PEC offices", an official source informed. The establishment of the Engineers Complex was a long-held dream of the engineering community and would help provide a state-of-the-art academy and residence besides other opportunities to the engineering community, the source said. The establishment of this complex will also help the engineering community play their role in addressing economic challenges being faced by the country and transform its role to meet modern requirements. The engineering community has acknowledged the efforts of Engr. M Najeeb Haroon, Chairman PEC, Engr Mukhtar Sheikh Vice Chairman Sindh PEC and Engr Arif Osmani who have played a key role in acquiring this land. They have also thanked the management committee for giving the approval and allocating the required funds for the project. The PEC Complex in DHA city holds immense promise for the engineering community, housing the prestigious Pakistan Academy of Engineering, IT Tower and the offices of PEC. The launching ceremony for the establishment of the Engineers Complex was held recently. --APP

## RDA issues notices to 2 illegal housing schemes

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of the Director General, Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa has issued notices to two illegal housing schemes and 11 land subdivisions. According to RDA spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate of RDA had issued notices to Malik Tassawar, Zakir, Malik Riyasat, Asim Aziz, Sheikh Maisam, Idress Awan, Master Zaheer, Syed Samar Shah, Ch Aslam Bani, Qazi Naveed, Haji Abrar, Ch. Hameed, Malik Aslam, Malik Ibrar, Khurram Qayum, Ch. Abid, Raja Tahir, Ch. Yasir, Kosar,

Badar, Anjum Kiyani and Tahir Madni, the owners of two private illegal housing schemes and 11 illegal subdivisions of the land namely Ittehad Town at Mouza Harnal on Mandra Chakwal Road Gujar Khan, Aziz Builders & Developers Pvt. Ltd at Mouza Jarary on Jorian to Gahi Syedan Road Rawalpindi, Land Subdivision at Mouza Kallar Budhal Tehsil Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Mankiyala Stupa Road, Land Subdivision Nazimabad at Mouza Louni Kallar Bypass Road Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Louni Tehsil Kallar Syedan and Land

Subdivision at Mouza Kallar Budhal Tehsil Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Bagga Sheikhan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Chak Bhatta, Dhamaal and Bishandot, Land Subdivision at Mouza Khabal and Sukhoo, Land Subdivision at Mouza Mera Sangal and two more Land Subdivisions at Mouza Khabal and Sukhoo. He said the DG had also directed the Director MP&TE that action should be taken against illegal advertisements and marketing and a First Information Report should also be lodged against the owners of illegal housing schemes. Moreover, the sponsors of illegal housing

schemes were directed to immediately stop the marketing of their unapproved and illegal housing schemes and contact RDA to get NOC/ approval of the scheme as per law, otherwise, strict legal action would be taken against the rules violators, he added. The citizens had also been requested not to invest in illegal and unauthorized housing schemes, he said adding, they were advised to check the status of the housing projects on the RDA official website www.rda.gov.pk. He said that the owners and sponsors of illegal housing schemes were misleading the public through illegal advertisements. In this regard, the Planning Wing RDA had also requested the Cyber Crime Wing, FIA to take legal action against the illegal. --APP

## NDRMF concludes capacity buildup of FIPs amid diversification of Fund's portfolio

ISLAMABAD: The National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF) on Wednesday successfully concluded its two-day third Accreditation Workshop intended to ensure capacity buildup of its fund implementing partners (FIPs) amid diversification of the Fund's portfolio on accreditation criteria and project proposal development. The NDRMF third Accreditation Workshop was in time step as there was need to update its accreditation criteria to cater the Fund's current mandate due to diversification of its portfolio and based on lesson learnt during execution of Phase-I and project grant financing. The workshop was organized on backdrop of initiation of phase-II of NDRMF funding, to help achieve an enhanced level of coordination, involvement and capacity building of the prospective FIPs for accreditation application, understanding of the fund's proposal format and related documentation. Addressing the

inaugural session, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), NDRMF, Bilal Anwar said the workshop was an exercise to calibrate ideas and thinking with the FIPs or partner organisation to fill the gaps. He said the repurposing and redefining goal of the NDRMF was driven by the challenges faced by the country in the realm of disaster risk reduction, climate change, disaster risk management and others. The achievements made by the Fund so far was being made in collaboration with the FIPs and it was important and required as structural work needed both physical work like building small dams, early warning systems, and address slow onset disasters like drought, malnutrition and food security, he added. "Climate change is bringing a new dimension of it and climate change is kind of a menace faced by the country that would become adverse in the future," he said. In the past few months, he said the Fund did a stocktaking of

the previous role of NDRMF and its overall performance which helped it come up with a few ticket items incorporated in its draft Business Policy being prepared. He provided a brief overview of the policy stating that disaster management was going to remain a major component of the disaster risk reduction work done by the fund which would make it more dependent on the expertise of the FIPs in this regard due to their assets and footprint extended to the remotest areas and communities of the country that were not accessible by the fund. "The philosophy of the NDRMF repurposing and redefining is that while it is strengthening and expanding itself in several areas and simultaneously it will be limiting itself in certain areas. We want to create a community of practitioners that is well equipped with developing trends and knowledge to tackle intricacies of managing climate-induced disasters and challenges," he said. --DNA

### Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

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



### Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115  
PIA Flight Info.....114  
PIA Cargo.....9280979  
Railway Inquiry.....117  
Railway Exchange 9270831-5  
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489  
CAA.....9281092



### Hospitals

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



### Departments

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

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

## General Practice

HEALTHCARE CENTRE

General Physician Services	General Surgery	Neurology	Plastic Surgery	Physiotherapy & Rehabilitation
Medicine	Pediatrics & Child Health	Orthopedics & Sports Medicine	Ear, Nose & Throat	Laboratory Services
Gynecology & Women's Health	Cardiology	Urology	Psychology & Mental Health	Nursing Services
Dermatology & Aesthetics	Psychiatry	Pulmonology	Ophthalmology	Diagnostic Radiology
Nutrition, Dietetics & Lifestyle	Dental & Maxillofacial Surgery	Gastroenterology & Hepatology	Regenerative	Powerplant Health Screening

Keeping you Healthy!

Welcome to Islamabad's finest private medical centre, where your complete wellbeing is our top priority. Keeping you healthy and in good physical condition is at the heart of everything we do. Our aim is to establish long-term trusting relationships with our patients and their families, offering them easy accessibility to health and continuity of care.

+92334 7474701 | +92 51 8900 682  
 28, Ground Floor, Executive Complex, G-8 Markaz, Islamabad  
 /generalpracticeislamabad  
[www.generalpractice.com.pk](http://www.generalpractice.com.pk)

## Briefs

Dr. Baig  
congratulated  
for winning the  
elections

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain on Wednesday welcomed the victory of a noted business leader in the general elections, terming it an excellent development. He said Dr. Mirza Ikhtiar Baig had secured victory in NA-241, which is encouraging as the business community will have a strong voice in the National Assembly. His achievement is the success of the entire business community. According to Mian Zahid Hussain, Dr Baig is a successful businessman who can represent Karachi well, which is essential to resolving the problems facing the business community. Karachi is the foundation of the national economy. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that we are pinning high hopes on Dr. Baig and hope that the PPP leadership will give him an important role in the future setup, which will be according to the aspirations of the business community. The business leader said that Dr Mirza Ikhtiar Baig is a leading industrialist with a vibrant career. He serves as Honorary Consul General Yemen, he has advised the PM on textiles, and was Senior Vice President of FPCCI. —DNA

EDOTCO  
Pakistan  
Spearheads  
Sustainable  
Development

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: EDOTCO Pakistan, a key player in the telecommunications infrastructure industry marked a significant stride in its dedication to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in 2023. The company's commitment to enriching underprivileged communities, particularly in areas with limited access to grid power, culminated in the successful execution of the Tower to Community (T2C) initiative. The visionary project, centered in Tehsil Kabir Wala, Multan, not only supplied clean energy to adjacent households but also set a benchmark in integrating sustainable energy practices with societal upliftment.

By tapping into solar energy, EDOTCO Pakistan innovatively utilized its towers not just as telecom infrastructure to connect the disconnected, but also as power sources for neighboring off-grid homes. This initiative underscores the company's role in driving sustainable development and cementing its unwavering dedication to enhancing community welfare and livelihoods.

In its continuous pursuit to community welfare, EDOTCO Pakistan also introduced the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) school program, a pioneering step in promoting health and safety awareness. The program was piloted in Islamabad and the Mansehra District, reflecting the company's proactive stance in creating a safer and more health-conscious environment. Implemented initially at the Mansehra Public School & College in April 2023, and subsequently at the Pehli Kiran Schools, Islamabad, in December 2023, the OHS program educated students on crucial health and safety standards. It also equipped them with essential first-aid kits and fire extinguishers, aligning with EDOTCO Pakistan's objective of fostering a secure and healthful society. Abdul Aziz, the Country Managing Director at EDOTCO Pakistan, shed light on the company's unwavering commitment to community upliftment through the successful execution of the T2C initiative and OHS School Program. He stated, "As an integral part of the EDOTCO Group, we consistently align our strategic initiatives with sustainable growth, with a laser focus on community development and positive impact creation."

Partnership with China  
could be productive: PTA

"Pakistanis prefer CTC tea from Africa and the two sides can work together to develop CTC flavors and liquid that are closest to what Pakistanis like," he said

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Zeeshan Maqsood, Executive Member and Former Senior Vice Chairman of the Pakistan Tea Association (PTA) called for stronger collaboration with China to meet the country's surging domestic demand for tea, as imports continue to increase. Tea imports into Pakistan experienced a 5.53% jump during the first six months of the current fiscal year, indicating a continued love affair with the brew, data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) showed. Tea imports into the country increased to \$336.423 million during July-December (2023-24) while the imports in July-December (2022-23) was \$318.798 million. Paki-

stan is one of the world's largest tea consumers and importers, with 1.1 kg per capita consumption. Strengthening the competitiveness of Pakistani tea is essential to boost domestic production, foreign exchange earnings and consumer welfare. It will also encourage innovation, technology adoption and attract foreign investment to further diversify and strengthen the Pakistani economy. Current challenges facing the Pakistani tea industry include competition from imports, limited marketing efforts and weak brand image, environmental and sustainability threats, and inadequate policy and regulatory frameworks. In an interview with Gwadar Pro, Zeeshan Maqsood highlighted the need to explore cooperation opportunities with

China, the world's largest tea producer. "China, as the leading producer of tea, offers immense potential and opportunities for collaboration," he added. Pakistan has limited tea production and relies heavily on imports to meet its domestic demand, while China produces a wide variety of tea, including green, black, and oolong tea and has a long history of tea cultivation and processing, providing Pakistan with some reference in technology, investment and trade. China has also set a highly successful example of how tea can help fight poverty. Tea, as a medium of friendship traced back to the ancient Silk Road times, has lasted for centuries. In cooperation with China, Pakistan has built its first modern tea plantation and achieved large-scale

production. China and Pakistan have also set up tea cooperation centers for tea research and cultivation. The current state of this collaboration is also positive and progressing. Both countries have recognized the potential for mutual benefit in this area, leading to several key projects and agreements. Over the years, the two countries have continued to cooperate in technology, investment and trade. It is worth mentioning that as an important part of the activities of the China-Pakistan Tourism Year 2023, the China Cultural Center of Pakistan launched an online exhibition on Chinese tea culture on international platforms, demonstrating Pakistan's recognition of Chinese tea and tea culture and the co-

operation efforts of both sides. He highlighted the potential for China and Pakistan to increase the number of cooperative varieties. "Pakistanis prefer CTC tea from Africa and the two sides can work together to develop CTC flavors and liquid that are closest to what Pakistanis like," he said. "With companies from both countries catering to the tastes and needs of Pakistanis, we need to establish a strong regulatory framework and quality control measures to ensure the tea meets international standards, harmonize taxation and give Chinese and Pakistani companies more opportunities to establish joint ventures in agriculture and packaging plants in the northern regions of Pakistan," he added.

Ms. Gul  
Meena  
Bilal meets  
with Akram  
Fareed

DNA

ISLAMABAD Chairperson National Vocational and Technical Training Commission Newtech Ms. Gul Meena Bilal met with Convener Skill Development and Technical and Vocational Education and Training Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Senior Vice Chairman All Pakistan Hotels Association M. Akram Fareed. In the meeting, M. Akram Farid said that for the development of the local industry, he emphasized the need to bring the skilled manpower to the modern requirements and said that there is a need to strengthen the industry-academia connection, he said that the market and There is a need to develop skilled manpower as per the demand of the industry, he assured of all kinds of cooperation to promote linkages between New Tech and local chambers and industry to create need-based manpower for the industrial sector. With the needs of the industry, training programs, workplace and career guidance and the use of technology in training were also discussed. The role of IT sector is very important, today's youth understand the importance and power of internet and are reaping financial benefits through e-commerce. IT and e-commerce training is very important for the youth, said Chairperson Nautik. That serious consideration will be given to form an advisory council in which all important stakeholders are represented. He said that Neotech is ready to open its facility desk in the Chamber to meet the skilled manpower requirements of the industrial sector. Sakti which includes pharmaceutical, flour mills, steel, oil and ghee and various industries, added that there are numerous opportunities in the hotel and tourism industry in the country.



ISLAMABAD: A woman is taking photo of heart shape red rose flower bouquet at flower market on Valentine's Day, in the Federal Capital. —ONLINE

Provision of quality  
healthcare facilities  
top priority of govt

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Dr. Nadeem Jan Wednesday said that the provision of quality medical facilities to the public was a top priority of the government. Talking to a Private news channel, the minister said that the government was introducing health reforms to cover essential primary healthcare services and secondary-level hospital care. He said all possible resources were being utilized for lessening the economic burden and raising the living standard of deprived segments of society. He underlined that the remarkable initiative of the government will tangibly reduce the burden on hospitals and thus will improve the quality of service delivery across the health system. He said that the government also promoted a culture of research in the healthcare sector, adding that Pakistan needs more efforts towards providing high-quality, cost-effective healthcare. The government is committed to transforming the country's entire healthcare landscape, he said, adding that ultimate goal of the government was to use digital technology for harmonization and integration of health-related to improve the health status and well-being of our people. Replying to a question, he said that the public was the asset of a country and considering that the caretaker government was investing in human capital. He said that the government was implementing a devised road map under a coordinated mechanism that would ensure better health facilities for all citizens, irrespective of their classes. The government was also ensuring the capacity building of the nursing and doctors staff through training of international standards, he added.—DNA

22 outlaws arrested; drugs  
and weapons recovered

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) arrested 22 outlaws including six professional beggars from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered drugs and weapons from their possession. According to ICP spokesman, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified its crackdown against the criminal elements to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directions, the Karachi city police team arrested an accused namely Munir Ahmed and recovered 480 grams of hashish from his possession. The Gola police team arrested an accused namely Manan Jameel involved in illegal gas refilling. The Sangiani police team arrested an accused namely Irshad Ahmed involved in illegal gas refilling. The Industrial Area police team also arrested an accused namely Alif Hussain and recovered one 30-bore pistol from his possession. The Shams Colony police team arrested two accused namely Dost Muhammad and Nadeem Khan and recovered one iron punch and 1,110 grams of hashish from their possession. Similarly, the Khanna police team arrested an accused namely Azhar and recovered one iron

punch from his possession, while the police team also arrested two accused namely Nasrullah and Muhammad Sher involved in illegal gas refilling and petrol selling. Moreover, The Humak police team arrested two accused namely Abid Ali and Nasir Ali and recovered one 30-bore pistol and 307 gram heroin from their possession. The Nilore police team arrested two accused namely Ghulam Hussain and recovered one 12-bore gun from his possession. Furthermore, the Bani Gala police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Sarfraz and Shakeel and recovered 380 grams of heroin and 25 litres of liquor from their possession, while the police team arrested two accused namely Tasawar Hussain and Shahid Rehman involved in illegally selling petrol and gas refilling. The separate cases have been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway. During the ongoing crackdown against professional beggars, the Islamabad Capital Police apprehended six professional beggars. ICCPO Dr Akbar Nasir Khan directed the police officials to further intensify the crackdown against the criminal elements. "Safety and security of the citizens is our foremost priority and no laxity will be tolerated in this regard", he maintained.—APP

Spring  
Festival  
pays way to  
understand  
Chinese  
culture

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Spring Festival, also known as Chinese New Year, is an important cultural event in China that offers a unique opportunity to understand Chinese culture and traditions, according to Pakistani diplomats. They believe that participating in the festival can help deepen the understanding between the people of Pakistan and China. Sardar Muhammad, Acting Consul General of Pakistan in Guangzhou told China Economic Net that this year they immersed themselves in the vibrant and colorful celebrations of the Chinese New Year in Guangzhou, embracing the traditions and customs of the Cantonese way of welcoming the Spring Festival. "We visited the flower market on Beijing Road where the atmosphere was alive with the energy of joyful Chinese families and children, adding to the festive spirit of the occasion. Our time in the bustling tourist spots of Guangzhou brought us even closer to the heart of the celebrations, with the kids eagerly leading us to the incredible Sunac Theme Park adorned with red lanterns and filled with exuberant families," he added.

Pakistan's sesame seeds export  
to China up 126% in 2023

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's export of sesame seeds to China surpassed \$290.66 million from January to December 2023, marking a growth of 126.29 percent on a year-on-year basis. Ghulam Qadir, Commercial Counsellor here at the Pakistan Embassy, stated that according to the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC), China imported 166,682.987 tons of sesame seeds from Pakistan in 2023. This represents an increase of 96.13% by volume, amounting to \$290.66 million, compared to 84,985.321 tons worth \$128.44 million in 2022, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. He added that during 2023, Pakistan's exports to China exceeded \$3.459 billion, an increase of 1.4% on a year-on-year basis. Qadir also mentioned that GACC data revealed 912,814.577 tons of sesame billion from around the world, worth \$309.51 million, remained China for the third consecutive \$290.66 million and Tanzania

Marriott Hotel opens Japanese  
restaurant 'Kiku'

Kiku's culinary team, led by Chef Mario with a passion for Japanese cuisine, has crafted a menu that showcases the finesse of contemporary Japanese dishes. Guests can anticipate a diverse selection of sushi, sashimi, and tempura, alongside a variety of creative dishes that capture the essence of Japan's seasonal and artful food culture

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Marriott Hotel is thrilled to announce the opening of its latest gastronomic venture, Kiku, a contemporary Japanese restaurant that promises an authentic journey through the culinary landscapes of Japan. The restaurant is now open to guests and is located on the ground floor, shows a sophisticated

ambiance that perfectly matches the innovative and refined flavors presented on the plate. Kiku's culinary team, led by Chef Mario with a passion for Japanese cuisine, has crafted a menu that showcases the finesse of contemporary Japanese dishes. Guests can anticipate a diverse selection of sushi, sashimi, and tempura, alongside a variety of creative dishes that capture the essence of Japan's seasonal and artful food culture. "We are excited to

bring Kiku to the heart of Islamabad," said Mr. David Richard O'Hanlon, General Manager of the Islamabad Marriott Hotel. "Our goal is to offer an unparalleled dining experience that transports our guests to Japan through each bite, and we are proud to present a menu that reflects both the tradition and innovation of Japanese cooking." Join us at Kiku for a taste of Japan, where every meal is a masterpiece, and every visit is an experience to remember.

Excise to facilitate citizens  
for vehicle registration under  
ICT doorstep initiative

ISLAMABAD: In a move to streamline services and bring them closer to the community, the Excise department on Wednesday is providing civic facilities to residents of the federal capital to get their vehicle registration as well as access to various essential services at Rose and Jasmine Garden under the ICT doorstep initiative. On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon, the excise staff would be stationed at the park's parking lot from 3.00 to 5.00 pm, ICT Spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabassum said. This initiative aims to streamline processes and provide ease to the public regarding vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax procedures, he added. In addition to the vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax services, the Facilitation Center Doorstep ICT Vehicle will also be offering the following services: domicile certificate, birth certificate, power of attorney, international driving permit, fuel permit (domestic/commercial), and Motor vehicle registration. The citizens are urged not to miss this opportunity to simplify bureaucratic processes and get everything done at the Rose and Jasmine Garden parking lot today.—DNA

The Smooth Moving Connection

## freeline MOVERS

PACKING, SHIPPING & FREIGHT FORWARDING

**Our Services**

- Packing
- Shipping
- Freight Forwarding
- Land, Sea & Air Freight
- Custom Clearance
- Relocations
- Office Removals
- Fine Art Handling
- Project Management
- Pet Relocation
- Warehousing
- Storage

**Head Office**  
3rd Floor, Yasin Plaza, 74-West, Blue Area, Islamabad.  
Tel: (+92 51) 2822471, 2274221, 2878029, 2272273, 2822711, 2874289 - Fax: (+92-51) 2825132, 2274227.  
E-mail: moving@freelinemovers.com - Website: www.freelinemovers.com

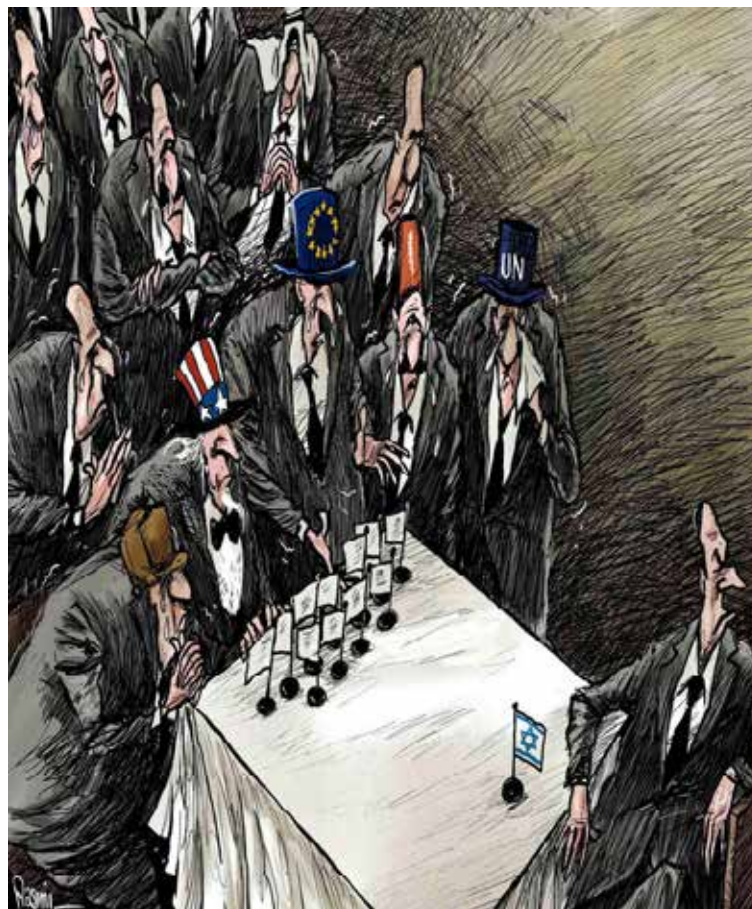
**Branch Offices**

<b>Karachi</b> Room No. 8/15, 3rd Floor, Kalkhambhai West, Main Tariq Road, TTD-1 Block 2, P.E.C.H.S. Karachi. Tel: (+92-21) 3403808, 3401949 Fax: (+92-21) 3405142 E-mail: karachi@freelinemovers.com	<b>Lahore</b> P-4 Gulberg Centre, Main Boulevard, Lahore. Tel: (+92-42) 3579891, 3579105 Fax: (+92-42) 3579102 E-mail: lahore@freelinemovers.com	<b>Peshawar</b> Office No. C-8, 3rd Floor, Zohrab Plaza, Lafic Road, Ring Road, Peshawar. Tel: (+92-91) 2527278 Fax: (+92-91) 2525988 E-mail: peshawar@freelinemovers.com	<b>Kabul</b> House #4, Street #4, Charikot Avenue Road, Shahr-e-Nau, Kabul - Afghanistan. Tel: (+92-902) 773 83 7973588, 883 7794838 E-mail: kabul@freelinemovers.com
---	---	--	--

## Drone wars: falling prices, rising casualties

THREE days into his presidency, Barack Obama ordered his first drone strikes. Over the next eight years, he oversaw a massive expansion of the US programme of targeted killings using armed drones. The initial appeal was that the US did not risk its personnel, and strikes could be carried out without attracting much attention and, supposedly, with more precision – though civilian deaths were ignored or played down. But in the ensuing years, drone wars have undergone a dramatic evolution. Never before have so many drones been used, so intensely. The US programme relied on expensive Predator drones costing about \$12m (£9.5m). But much cheaper drones made by Turkey, Iran and China have been credited for victories, including Ethiopia's reversal of the rapid advance of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, and for damaging attacks by non-state actors. In 2021, Gen Kenneth McKenzie, then commander of US Central Command, observed: "For the first time since the Korean war, we are operating without complete air superiority." The picture has come even more starkly into focus since he spoke. In Ukraine and Myanmar, commercial drones designed for hobbyists or agriculture and costing just a few hundred dollars have been equipped for attacks, aiding the underdog in asymmetric conflicts. (The Royal United Services Institute estimated last year that Ukraine was losing 10,000 drones a month.) Myanmar's junta is struggling to hold on to the country after three years of civil war, with drones playing a key role. Two weeks ago, more sophisticated Ukrainian sea drones, reportedly costing tens of thousands of dollars, sank a Russian warship worth tens of millions in the Black Sea. The importance of the new breed of armed drones should not be overstated. Most of them fail in their missions. The damage they can inflict is minimal compared with missiles. They are often most effective for symbolic strikes or damage to economic infrastructure, such as power networks, and when used alongside conventional weapons. A 2019 drone and missile attack on oil-processing facilities – claimed by Houthis, though others had their doubts – temporarily halved Saudi Arabia's oil production. Using drones has also enabled Ukraine to hit targets deep in Russian territory, which it is not allowed to do with donated weapons. And even when the devices are intercepted, the cost can be punitive: Shahed drones used by Houthi rebels cost around £16,000, while Sea Viper missiles used by the British navy to fend them off cost upwards of £1m. The effectiveness of armed drones is sufficiently evident that Russia has adopted Ukraine's techniques itself. The US military is also looking to invest in large numbers of cheap drones alongside its multimillion-dollar Reapers. The dangers are mounting as technology develops: one major concern is powerful AI-enabled drone swarms of multiple devices communicating with each other autonomously. The risk of these in the hands of terrorist groups is particularly stark. Though some actors will not be bound by rules, the rapid proliferation demands serious international discussion of drone use, rather than just unilateral codes – however hard that is to envision under current circumstances. The US drone wars showed how unmanned aerial vehicles increased secrecy around military missions, reduced accountability and, critically, lowered the threshold for the use of force.

Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily  
 Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti  
 Deputy Editor: Abid Raza  
 Member APNS / ABC Certified  
 Vol: 05 Issue: 120  
 Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com  
 Phone: 051-2266165 / 051-2261960  
 Off 11: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad



## The view on Labour's Rochdale mess

RATHER than confront the paramount need to deal with the profoundly serious issue of antisemitism in the [Labour] party, both factions treated it as a factional weapon." So wrote Martin Forde KC in his landmark 2022 report into allegations of bullying, racism and sexism made during the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Nothing seems to have changed, according to the barrister. He thought Labour had acted in a "shambolic" manner in first backing and then dropping its Rochdale byelection candidate over his objectionable views. Labour had not acted on his report's recommendation that disciplinary matters be handled in a "neutral and objective way". Sir Keir Starmer's party had initially taken no action against its Blairite Muslim candidate Azhar Ali, who had espoused an antisemitic conspiracy theory during a meeting of the Lancashire Labour party. This despite his offence being more egregious than those committed by MPs on the left who had been swiftly suspended. Given that parliamentarians have been waiting months for decisions, Sir Keir's uneven response invited cynicism and scorn. That explains why another (anti-Corbynite) Labour parliamentary candidate in Lancashire was swiftly suspended on Tuesday night over comments made about Israel. Mr Ali had apologised for saying Israel "allowed" Hamas's 7 October massacre to take place. This error of judgment should have been picked up before Mr Ali was selected. That it was not is revealing about the fractious state of today's Labour party in which Sir Keir's defence of Israeli actions that appeared to be war crimes and an apparent unwillingness to stand up for Palestinian human rights have caused widespread disquiet. Mr Ali's position became untenable after a recording surfaced that suggested his earlier utterance was not a one-off mistake. Perhaps Labour saw Mr Ali as the best hope of defeating the demagogic George Galloway. Since 2005, the ex-Labour politician has twice defeated his old party by tapping into discontent among Muslim voters, who make up a third of Rochdale's electorate. Mr Ali may still win as his name cannot be removed from the ballot paper. That would present Labour with a dilemma, as failure to restore the whip might alienate voters who backed Mr Ali despite his views. Sir Keir has promoted the idea that he was an unequivocal friend of Israel, partly to distance himself from Mr Corbyn. The competitive internal battle between factions is not intrinsically destructive. It can produce new ideas that regenerate the party as times have changed. Sir Keir's admiration of Harold Wilson, a staunch defender of Israel, might explain his actions. Angered in 1973 during the Yom Kippur war by the Heath government's decision to impose an arms embargo on both sides in the hope of appeasing the oil-producing Arab states, the Labour leader overrode shadow cabinet dissent to impose a three-line whip on Labour MPs. He lost the vote but went on to win the election. Today's conflict in the Middle East, however, is an even more neuralgic subject in Labour. In 2019, nearly 80% of Muslims voted Labour. In 2010, only 37% did. Sir Keir may think his polling lead is large enough to take a hit.

# Election 2024: accusations of rigging

Waheed Hussain



Looking at the number of seats being captured by different parties, it suggests, that PTI is the actual beneficiary of the so-called rigging, if there was any? Imran Khan in 2013 elections presented the narrative of 35 punctures. He held 126 days sit-in in front of the Parliament House along with his former associate Dr. Tahir ul Qadri. Later in a TV interview he explained that he got this figure of 35-punctures from one of the TV programs

SINCE 1985, I have been watching conduct of general elections, the winners always declared the process free, fair and transparent, while, the losers called it rigged. The last week elections ended up with the same old narrative of accusations and counter-accusations of massive rigging and irregularities across the country. In interior Sindh the GDA, in Karachi Jamat-Islami, Tehreek Labaak Pakistan and Pakistan Tehreek Insaf, in Baluchistan the nationalists and JUI (F), in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Awami National Party, while in Punjab PTI were protesting against the ECP blaming it for failing to hold free, fair and transparent polls on February 8, 2024. Other than Pakistan Tehreek-Insaf (PTI), most of these protesting political parties have ethnic, regional and religious outlook. Even in the past they used to win seats in a single digit, except when they had formed election alliances either at the provincial or national levels. For example, Jamaat-Islami along with other religious like-minded parties formed a Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) in 1990 elections against the Pakistan Peoples' Party. The leading party in IJI was Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz). Again, in 2002 multi-party religious alliance Muttahida Majlis-i Amal (MMA) was formed including Jamaat Islami (JI) and Jamiat Ulema-Islam (Fazal) and others. The alliance had won good number of seats in the national assembly and formed a government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province. However, as a single political party, they never won a big number of national or provincial assemblies' seats to form an independent government. No doubt, Tehreek Labaak Pakistan (TLP) has huge following in the country. It succeeded in getting millions of votes from various constituencies in 2018, as well as in the present general elections. However, it needs some more time to win election and reach to the national or provincial assemblies. Awami National Party (ANP) has been winning seats in various districts of the KPK province including Charsadda, Mardan, Peshawar, Sawabi, Nowshera and Malakand districts in the past. But since 2013 the PTI has defeated ANP like other political parties in the province. As for as Grand Democratic Alliance in Sindh was concerned, it was facing a tough competition from PPP. Former President of Pakistan and co-chairman, Asif Ali Zardari's controlled and managed party was ruling the Sindh province for past 15 years. The party has a strong hold on the provincial politics. It has won the election for fourth consecutive time and ready to form another provincial government in few

days. We should not forget the fact that Pakistani politics is combination of populism, power and money. In the recent elections voters in Baluchistan preferred to elect the main stream national political parties instead of supporting the regional ethnic ones. Most of the seats in the province were being won by the PPP, JUI (F) and the PML (N). Keeping in mind the Pakistani political and administrative structure, no doubt, that there must have been some irregularities and short-comings in the election process in some constituencies, yet, declaring the entire election exercise a faulty, is a sweeping statement based on a political point scoring. I am sure when the prominent lawyers like Salman Akram Raja and Shohaib Shaheen, who were contesting election for the national assembly from Lahore and Islamabad constituencies would present a credible evidence of rigging in the court. The massive rigging narrative is being crafted by the PTI social media teams to target the ECP, political opponents as well as the establishment. Suppose if any state institution was involved in the rigging, then how PTI-backed independent candidates could win hundreds of national and provincial assemblies' seats? The final results tell that the party stood first in the National Assembly, won 85 percent seats in KP, grabbed more than 115 seats in Punjab. Was the rigging done to benefit the PTI? Many PML (N) senior leaders such as Khawaja Saad Raftiq, Rana Sanaullah, Khuram Dastagir and Abid Sher Ali, who have been winning elections for decades from their respective constituencies have lost the election and respectfully accepted their defeat. If the rigging was done, why they were left out of the assembly? If the rigging was done why Nawaz League got just 73 seats out of 266? Looking at the number of seats being captured by different parties, it suggests, that PTI is the actual beneficiary of the so-called rigging, if there was any? Imran Khan in 2013 elections presented the narrative of 35 punctures. He held 126 days sit-in in front of the Parliament House along with his former associate Dr. Tahir ul Qadri. Later in a TV interview he explained that he got this figure of 35-punctures from one of the TV programs. He could not prove anything regarding his claim in the superior court. The rest is the history. When his party won the election in 2018, the PDM accused him of rigging. He was accused of being a product of RTS. For four years he was tagged as selected instead of an elected Prime Minister of Pakistan. This political attitude has to change. This problem is not only with the PTI

but most of the political parties have the same undemocratic, negative and selfish approach. Every citizen has the constitutional right to protest, however, such demonstration must be peaceful. The crowd should not harm the public and private properties. They should ensure the safety of the citizens. They should ensure free movement of the masses. But again, will these protests will address the actual issue until the candidates and the political parties approach the right forums. At the end of the day, they have to reach out to ECP and courts for the redressal of their complaints. The problem with the PTI is that its leadership has always been using an abusive, harsh and derogatory language against all institutions including the judiciary and military. Unfortunately, the party's social media teams follow the same practice. Social media is a platform to inform, educate and entertain the public. It's a good source of political communication too. But some of our political parties used the platform for targeting state institutions and personalities. The social media intolerance is giving birth to the digital violence in the society. Culture of digital intolerance is harming the young generation. It's the responsibility of all political parties specially PTI and PML (N) to follow a code of conduct on the social media while expressing their political opinions, issuing statements or reactions. After the last week elections trends on the 'X' platform have been launched not to criticize the election conducting body but to damage the security institutions of the country. From political point of view the purpose of PTI protests and social media campaign regarding election results must be a strategy to put maximum pressure on the institutions and legal forums to get some kind of relief for the party leadership. With all difficulties and hurdles in the elections, PTI has performed well. It is going to form a government in PK. It has good numbers at center and Punjab. However, Imran Khan has decided not to sit with PPP, PML (N) and the MQM in coalition. Like other political parties, PTI does not have sufficient MNAs to form a government on its own. Naturally, it will sit on the opposition benches both at center and in Punjab. As an opposition it can give tough time to any future government. Learning from the past mistakes, PTI should remain part of a parliamentary system. In assemblies it will be able to challenge decisions of the government. All political players are supposed to give up their personal agendas and give the country first priority. – The writer is a senior print and broadcast journalist

## PTI's challenges: stolen & reserved seats, and shifting loyalties

Qamar Bashir



The electoral framework in Pakistan, as delineated by the Elections Act, 2017, is structured to uphold the sanctity and integrity of the voting process through a series of meticulous procedures and checks. From the initial step of voter identification, which leverages both traditional ID cards and advanced technologies like biometric verification, to the methodical issuance and tracking of ballot papers marked with indelible ink, the system is designed to mitigate risks of impersonation and double voting

PAKISTAN Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) finds itself embroiled in a multifaceted crisis, grappling with significant challenges that threaten its political standing and influence in both the National and Provincial Assemblies. At the heart of this turmoil is a contentious legal struggle to reclaim seats that PTI alleges were unjustly wrested from its grasp, amidst accusations of a biased Election Commission and state machinery ostensibly arrayed against it. This situation is further compounded by the unsettling trend of PTI-endorsed candidates, who secured their victories largely through the party's support and the charismatic appeal of its former chairman, Imran Khan, now defecting under the pressures of coercion or the allure of incentives. Faced with this precarious scenario, PTI's ability to retain its elected representatives is severely constrained, leaving the party in a vulnerable position. The shifting allegiances of its candidates not only undermine PTI's legislative strength but also pose profound questions about party loyalty and political integrity in Pakistan's tumultuous political landscape. In response to these daunting challenges, PTI must tread carefully, adhering scrupulously to the stipulations of the Elections Act, 2017 (Section 104). This legal framework, while offering a pathway to address grievances, also demands meticulous compliance and strategic acumen from PTI as it seeks to navigate these turbulent waters. The party's journey ahead is fraught with legal, political, and ethical hurdles, requiring a delicate balance between legal recourse, political strategy, and the maintenance of its core principles and public image. Given this legal context, PTI's options to prevent defections are primarily political rather than legal. They may engage in negotiations or employ party-level strategies to retain their members. It may rely on internal rules or moral suasion to influence members' loyalty. Legally, the party should rely on pre-election agreements, if any, or party constitutions that candidates may have agreed to, which might include clauses related to party loyalty or penalties for defection PTI could explore enforcing these agreements. However, the enforceability of such agreements is contingent upon their specific terms and compatibility with Pakistani law. Additionally, PTI could consider filing election petitions if there is substantial evidence of electoral fraud or malpractice associated with the defection. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these legal measures is uncertain, given the lack of clear statutory provisions addressing post-election party loyalty. In Pakistan's political landscape, such issues of defection and party loyalty have historically been more amenable to political resolutions rather than legal interventions. In the case of reserve seats, PTI has limited options. Since PTI could not file the initial list submission reflecting the party's eventual electoral strength or diversity, PTI could explore forming alliances or negotiating coalition agreements with other parties. These political maneuvers would involve discussions around policy concessions or legislative support in exchange for backing PTI's nominees for key positions, thereby indirectly enhancing their representation in the

assembly. Such alliances not only require adept negotiation skills but also a willingness to engage in give-and-take, balancing the party's immediate needs with its long-term policy objectives. PTI faces formidable challenges in its quest for justice concerning allegations of extensive electoral rigging that ostensibly transformed its potential victories and defeats. The party contends that it is up against an overwhelming adversary, with accusations that the entire Election Commission, along with various state institutions, is determined to thwart PTI's aspirations for a majority government, particularly at the federal level. This perceived alliance against PTI is accused of employing a wide array of tactics, both within and beyond the legal framework, to systematically undermine the party's electoral success and political influence. The avenues available to PTI for contesting these allegations and seeking redress are notably constrained under these circumstances. The party's battle is not merely legal but also deeply political, entailing a struggle against a network of powerful forces allegedly aligned in opposition. This situation places PTI in a precarious position, necessitating a multifaceted strategy that goes beyond conventional legal challenges. It requires mobilizing public support, international advocacy for fair play, and engaging in diplomatic channels to highlight the perceived injustices. The party's endeavor to overturn the alleged manipulation and secure its rightful place in the political arena is a testament to the turbulent nature of democratic processes in contexts where the impartiality of electoral bodies and state institutions is called into question. The electoral framework in Pakistan, as delineated by the Elections Act, 2017, is structured to uphold the sanctity and integrity of the voting process through a series of meticulous procedures and checks. From the initial step of voter identification, which leverages both traditional ID cards and advanced technologies like biometric verification, to the methodical issuance and tracking of ballot papers marked with indelible ink, the system is designed to mitigate the risks of impersonation and double voting. The public announcement of provisional results, followed by a transparent consolidation process in the presence of contesting candidates or their representatives, further enhances the credibility of the electoral process. These procedural safeguards, coupled with the option for any grievances to be thoroughly investigated by Election Tribunals, including the verification of thumb impressions against electoral rolls, form a robust framework intended to deter and detect malfeasance. However, the efficacy of this system in delivering justice, particularly in the face of allegations of widespread rigging, hinges on the integrity with which these procedures are implemented. While the law provides a comprehensive blueprint to safeguard electoral integrity, its success ultimately depends on the impartial execution by election officials and the vigilant oversight by political parties, candidates, and civil society. The provisions for legal recourse and the establishment of Election Tribunals serve as a critical backstop, offering a pathway to challenge and rectify potential irregularities.

This multi-layered approach, combining preventive measures with mechanisms for redress, embodies the legislative intent to create a foolproof electoral system. Yet, the true measure of its effectiveness lies in its application, underscoring the importance of vigilance, transparency, and accountability at every stage of the electoral process. In the intricate tapestry of Pakistan's political arena, PTI emerges as the dominant force at the Centre, yet finds itself short of achieving a simple majority. This scenario necessitates alliances for governance, but ideological rifts with major parties like PPP and PML(N) sharply limit PTI's options, steering it towards a probable tenure in opposition. This position compels PTI to focus on reclaiming what it alleges are its unfairly lost seats, while navigating the complex dynamics of parliamentary politics. Despite the challenging circumstances, there's a simmering discourse among PTI leaders about the potential for a coalition with PPP. Such a partnership, though fraught with complexities due to fundamental ideological divergences, holds a glimmer of possibility. Realizing this alliance would require exceptional diplomatic finesse and a willingness to engage in pragmatic policy compromises. For PTI, this path demands a strategic recalibration to forge a united front with PPP, ensuring that governance is marked by cohesion and effectiveness despite the underlying ideological disparities. Conversely, in provinces like Punjab and Sindh, where PTI is not the dominant force, the party faces a more complex situation. In Punjab, where PML(N) leads, and Sindh, predominantly under PPP control, PTI's prospects for forming a government are slim. The political dynamics in these regions might compel PTI to adopt a role in the opposition, focusing on legislative influence and preparing for future electoral opportunities. Whereas, Baluchistan offers a unique challenge where PTI didn't do well compared to any other national party. Navigating the tumultuous waters of Pakistan's political landscape, PTI stands at a crossroads, facing daunting challenges that test its resilience, strategic acumen, and ideological commitment. The party's struggle to reclaim its allegedly stolen seats, counter the shifting loyalties of its representatives, and grapple with the complexities of forming alliances underlines the intricate balance between political pragmatism and principled governance. As PTI endeavors to solidify its position, whether in governance or opposition, its actions will not only shape its own future but also have profound implications for the democratic fabric of Pakistan. The path PTI chooses to pursue in this critical juncture will be a testament to its vision for the nation, its commitment to justice, and its capacity to navigate the intricate interplay of power, loyalty, and ideology in the quest for a more transparent and accountable political order.

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

## Briefs

## JUI (F) rejects elections results

FROM PAGE 01  
“The JUI-F will play its parliamentary role and join the assemblies, but with reservations,” the senior politician said in a press conference on Wednesday, in which he categorically rejected the February 8 nationwide poll results. Fazl added that “rigging” in 2024 broke records of 2018 elections, alleging that the poll organising authority was held hostage by the establishment. He went on to say that the May 9 narrative was seemingly buried if the establishment deemed the Feb 8 polls fair. It is pertinent to mention here that the Fazl-led party managed to win four National Assembly (NA) seats and 18 provincial assembly seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, as per unofficial election results. Maulana Fazl termed the top electoral body’s role in the 2024 general polls “suspicious”. He alleged that the commission was suspending petitions of JUI-F candidates without issuing any notices.

## JI rules out alliance with PTI

FROM PAGE 01  
parties while party leader Ali Muhammad Khan is in favour of negotiations. Emphasising the prospects of a possible working relationship with the parties, the politician said PTI can talk to all parties to solve the country’s problems. “We have no personal fight with these parties,” Ali said during an interview with a private news channel. The politician added that all parties have different politics. He said the parties contesting against each other will eventually come together after the elections. The former minister said the PTI is ready to sit with other political forces “tomorrow morning” if it is done to solve the country’s issues. The politician emphasised that PTI is the “largest political party” in Pakistan. It should be noted that the PTI has claimed to join hands with Majlis-e-Wahdat-Muslimeen (MWM) to form its governments in Centre and Punjab, upon the direction of its founder.

## President Abbas urges Hamas to agree...

FROM PAGE 01  
President Abbas called on the US administration and the Arab nations to work seriously to complete the prisoner swap deal as quickly as possible, in order to “spare the Palestinian people the scourge of this devastating war.” The President said that the Israeli occupation is waging an open war on the Gaza Strip, which has led to the killing of hundreds of Palestinian people every day, in addition to storming of the West Bank and Jerusalem, and other dangerous Israeli escalation. “Therefore, we must bear our responsibilities in stopping this comprehensive war on Palestinian people,” he said. President Abbas added that “we hold everyone responsible for placing any obstacles from any party to disrupt the deal, because things are no longer tolerable, and it is time for everyone to bear responsibility.” The President continued, “We want to protect our people from the repercussions of any serious disaster that will befall them, so we must make decisions that serve the interests of our people and protect them, so that we can defend our cause and our national interests, by stopping the aggression, recognizing the independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, and continuing our comprehensive political efforts before the UN Security Council and the rest of the international institutions to obtain full membership for the State of Palestine in the United Nations.” President Abbas concluded, “Once again, we call on everyone, especially the Hamas movement, to quickly complete the deal so that we can protect our people and remove all obstacles.”

## The Monal Group joins hands with Peshawar Zalmi for PSL 9

Luqman Ali Afzal, Chairman The Monal Group shared his views by saying: “We are excited to partner with Peshawar Zalmi, a sporting brand that is recognized for its cricketing genius with some of the best cricketers in the world. We are entering PSL 9 as Peshawar Zalmi’s official Catering Partner and will work on expanding this relationship in years to come”

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Monal Group a leading market player in the hospitality and catering industry of Pakistan has signed a strategic partnership with a top Pakistani cricket franchise, Peshawar Zalmi for the upcoming Pakistan Super League (PSL) season 9.

This partnership is a stepping stone of a long-term alliance between two dynamic entities, where each embodying brilliance in their respective fields. Speaking about the partnership after MOU Signing Ceremony, Hasaan Butt, CEO The Monal Group and Abbas Layaq, COO Peshawar Zalmi were excited about this strategic alliance between both brands for PSL 9.

Further, Luqman Ali Afzal, Chairman The Monal Group shared his views by saying: “We are excited to partner with Peshawar Zalmi, a sporting brand that is recognized for its cricketing genius with some of the best cricketers in the world. We are entering PSL 9 as Peshawar Zalmi’s official Catering Partner and will work on expanding this relationship in years to come.”



## Babar maintains supremacy in ICC ODI rankings

Babar occupies the fifth spot with 768 rating points. Kiwi pacer Kyle Jamieson’s outstanding six-wicket haul against South Africa propelled him six places up to eighth in the Test rankings

DNA

LAHORE: Babar Azam maintains his supremacy in the ODI batter rankings, holding a formidable 824 rating points. Despite his stronghold, a trio of Sri Lankan players showcased remarkable performances against Afghanistan, making notable strides in the rankings. Charith Asalanka’s unbeaten 97 in the second match propelled him five places up to 15th, while Pathum Nissanka’s impressive double century in the series opener earned him a significant 10-spot leap to 18th. Sadeera Samarawickrama’s elegant half-century helped

him climb six positions to 41st. Shubman Gill secures the second spot with 801 rating points, followed closely by Virat Kohli at third with 768 points. In a significant turn of events, Afghanistan’s Mohammad Nabi usurped Shikib Al Hasan to claim the top spot in the ICC Men’s ODI All-Rounder Rankings. Nabi’s splendid century against Sri Lanka propelled him to the pinnacle, ending Shikib’s five-year reign. Nabi’s remarkable performance also elevated him to seventh place in the ODI bowlers’ rankings. In the T20I batting rankings, Mohammad Rizwan of Pakistan holds

the third position with 800 rating points, closely followed by Babar Azam in fourth place with 764 points. Surya Kumar Yadav currently leads with 861 rating points. Besides it, Adam Zampa climbed five places to equal 11th in the T20I bowling rankings, while Marcus Stoinis moved up three spots to second in the list for T20I all-rounders, inching closer to Shikib’s position following his standout performance against the West Indies. Kane Williamson continues to dominate the Test rankings for batters with an impressive 883 points, bolstered by twin centuries in the first

Test against South Africa. Babar Azam occupies the fifth spot with 768 rating points. Kiwi pacer Kyle Jamieson’s outstanding six-wicket haul against South Africa propelled him six places up to eighth in the Test rankings. Furthermore, he ascended two spots to 13th in the list for Test all-rounders. Australia’s triumph over the West Indies in a 2-1 series victory brought notable changes in the T20I rankings. Glenn Maxwell, Tim David, and David Warner made significant advancements in the batting rankings, while West Indies’ Rovman Powell and Johnson Charles also witnessed upward movement.

## Kenya's Sarah banned for 8 years over doping

KENYA’S Sarah Chepchirchir was slapped with an eight-year ban after the former Tokyo Marathon winner was found to have violated anti-doping regulations for a second time, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) announced in a statement. Chepchirchir was found guilty of an adverse analytical finding for testosterone, the AIU said. The sample was collected at the Bangsena42 Chonburi Marathon in Thailand in November. The 39-year-old was previously banned for four years in 2019, backdated to April 11, 2018, because of abnormalities in her athlete blood passport. The latest ban will be backdated to December 22, 2023 and Chepchirchir’s competition results from November 5 onwards will be disqualified. Chepchirchir, who won the Tokyo Marathon in 2017, had the option to have the ban reduced by one year by formally admitting to the charge, but failed to do so by the deadline of Feb. 11. Last year, the AIU and the Anti-Doping Agency of Kenya said a “medically-savvy operation” was helping Kenyan athletes cover up doping offences. Several Kenyan athletes have received bans or provisional suspensions in recent years, including Titus Ekiru, Betty Wilson Lempus and Diana Kipyokei. The AIU also announced a 12-year ban for Indian hammer thrower Rachna Kumari, who competed at last year’s Asian Games. Kumari had previously served a doping ban from 2015-19. —Agencies

## Hamas heads to Cairo truce talks

FROM PAGE 01

CIA Director William Burns had joined Tuesday’s talks with David Barnea, head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence service, which Egyptian media said had been mostly “positive.” US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby described the negotiations as “constructive and moving in the right direction.” Mediators are racing to secure a pause to the fighting before Israel proceeds with a full-scale ground incursion into the Gaza Strip’s far-southern city of Rafah, where more than 1.4 million Palestinians are trapped. The potential for mass civilian casualties has triggered urgent appeals, even from close allies, for Israel to hold off sending troops into the last major population center they have yet to enter in the four-month war. Key ally the United States has said it will not back any ground operation in Rafah without a “credible plan” for protecting civilians. Rafah is the main entry point for desperately needed relief supplies and UN agencies have warned of a humanitarian disaster if an assault goes ahead. UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said any military operation “could lead to a slaughter.”

## CJP comes down hard on army...

FROM PAGE 01

On this point lawyer for the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) intervened and told the court that the building from which the allottees sold the land based on fake documents and now a five-story building sits there. At this, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar remarked that the ETPB was a bystander when the five-story building was being constructed. However, CJP Isa observed that it would not have been possible without the involvement of the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA). He then further remarked that the assets of officers above the rank of inspector at the SBCA should be checked. “The Karachi sub registry’s assets should also be audited by the FBR. The residents of demolished buildings should receive money from all assets beyond means,” said the CJP. He also added that the Sindh government would never do an inquiry on this. On this point, the director general of the SCBA appeared in court and the CJP inquired how many inspectors and officers were part of the department. The DG informed the court that currently there are 1,400 employees with the SCBA out of which 600 are building inspectors and 300 are senior inspectors.

## CJP directs police to handle...

FROM PAGE 01

and ordered a further inquiry into the blasphemy case. The Supreme Court (SC) directed that keeping in view the sensitivity of blasphemy cases the supervision and investigation will not be carried out by an officer below the rank of SP. In compliance with the SC’s order, the SSP and SP Islamabad Police appeared in court where CJP Isa questioned: “Whether the SP or SSP should be suspended for violating the law?” The lawyer argued that the police are scared of blasphemy cases; they register a case as soon as one comes. To this CJP Isa replied, “Who will remain courageous if the police become timid?” Furthermore, Justice Isa asked, “Can the police enter someone’s house without a warrant? Where did the sanctity and respect for privacy go? He inquired from the SSP, “Can someone search your home without a warrant?” According to the Police Order 2002, entering someone’s house without a warrant is punishable by five years, stated Justice Isa. He further said, “You have made a blasphemy case based on a picture as if you are the protector of Islam.” Justice Isa said that first a blasphemy case was registered, then an arrest was made, and then the photo was recovered.

## ‘Alcaraz a Prince, not King,’ says top Spanish coach

PARIS: Carlos Alcaraz may be seen as a rising star in men’s tennis, but Samuel Lopez, a member of his coaching team at the JC Ferrero Academy in Spain, isn’t quick to crown him just yet. The 20-year-old made waves with his remarkable five-set victory over Novak Djokovic in the 2023 Wimbledon final, marking himself as a potential successor to the tennis throne. Following the match, Djokovic commended the young Spaniard, suggesting he possessed qualities reminiscent of the Big 3 [Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, and Djokovic] in his game. However, Lopez downplayed the hype surrounding Alcaraz. “I believe Djokovic felt compelled to say something about Carlos [after the final]. Perhaps it’s an extraordinary comparison, which is very flattering for Carlos. But it’s not accurate,” Lopez remarked. “Undoubtedly, he has the talent, comparable to [Jannik] Sinner. But for now, the Big 3 reign supreme. Carlos is a prince. He must strive, persevere, and perhaps one day ascend to become a king like them.” Although Lopez’s playing career wasn’t exceptional, his coaching credentials are strong. He presently coaches Pablo Carreno Busta, a former World No. 10 who clinched the Olympic bronze medal in Tokyo by defeating Djokovic. —Agencies

## Boult returns for NZ T20I series against Australia

AUCKLAND: Trent Boult was included in the New Zealand squad for part of the upcoming Twenty20 series against Australia on Wednesday. The development indicates that Boult is still in the plans for the World Cup in June. Boult, who has seen a reduction in appearances in limited overs cricket for his country since moving off a central contract with New Zealand Cricket in 2022, will be available for the second and third match of the series. However, Tim Southee will be rested after the first match in the series in Wellington on February 21 before he leads the Black Caps in two home Tests against Australia. “Trent’s got goals and ambitions to still be part of the T20 World Cup squad,” coach Gary Stead said. “We thought this fitted really nicely with Timmy playing the first one then having a little bit of a break before the

test series and Trent coming in.” A weakened batting line-up will take the field in the T20 series with Kane Williamson out due to paternity leave and Daryl Mitchell absent with a foot injury. Both are expected to be available for the Test series. Their absence led to inclusion of uncapped Josh Clark and his fellow all-rounder Rachin Ravindra, who impressed at last year’s 50-overs World Cup and has made a successful return to Test cricket in the ongoing South Africa series. “It’s never ideal missing two of your best players for such a big series but we do have a lot of faith in the guys coming in,” said selector Sam Wells. “Josh hits the ball as long and as hard as anyone and ... Rachin’s talent and class has been clear to all over the past six months.” The second and third matches in the series take place at Auckland’s Eden Park on February 23 and 25. —DNA



## Naqvi visits NCA, reviews ongoing renovation work

Chairman PCB also visits the Cricket Museum being established in the National Cricket Academy and expressed his indignation over witnessing poor state of the cricket museum

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi visited the National Cricket Academy and inspected the ongoing renovation work. Chairman PCB also visited the Cricket Museum being established in the National Cricket Academy and expressed his indignation over witnessing poor state of the cricket museum. Mohsin Naqvi emphasised that there is a dire need to upgrade the cricket museum. Keeping the trophies and other prizes on winning international tournaments in such a pathetic state is highly inappropriate. International trophies and other prizes are not only an asset but also a source of great interest for the cricket lovers. Mohsin Naqvi directed to keep the gift items in the cricket museum according to the international standard. He also sought a plan with regard to relocating

the cricket museum to a spacious and an appropriate place. Chairman PCB also inspected the ground of the National Cricket

Academy. Chief Secretary, COO PCB, Secretary C&W and concerned officials were also present on the occasion. Earlier on, Mo-

hsin Naqvi, Chairman PCB: “It is a pleasure to announce that PSL is entering its ninth season, and I am proud to say that PSL contin-

ues to be a success story for Pakistan cricket. “Today, as we unveil this Orion trophy, we look forward to a month-long celebration of the beautiful game of cricket and the excitement and drama that accompanies it. “PSL connects to the hearts of people of Pakistan, who cherish every thrilling moment of the game. Be it towering sixes, high-intensity bowling, and top-notch catches, PSL offers an emotional rollercoaster. “I would like to thank the title sponsor of the league, they truly have uplifted the game of cricket in our country through their support and have become synonymous with the name of the league. All the successes over the past eight years are a testament to commitment to the Pakistan Super League. “I also want to thank the representatives of all six teams for being present here today and I wish all teams the best of luck for the season. May the best team lift this prestigious trophy.”



## Briefs

## Japan PM plans S. Korea visit on March 20

TOKYO : Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is considering visiting South Korea on March 20, broadcaster media reported on Wednesday. Kishida seeks to meet President Yoon Suk Yeol and discuss issues including North Korea ahead of the South Korean legislative election in April, media reported, citing government sources. Officials in both Tokyo and Seoul said nothing was planned when asked about the report. "Japan and South Korea are important neighbors who should cooperate as partners in addressing various issues in the international community," said Japan's top government spokesperson Yoshimasa Hayashi, adding the two neighbors will continue to maintain close communication. U.S., South Korea and Japan Announce It's the 'Right Time' to Share Missile Data After Latest North Korean ICBM Test Kishida last visited South Korea in May 2023 as part of the two East Asian neighbours' "shuttle diplomacy", or regular visits between the leaders in the wake of improved bilateral relations. Japan PM vows to do "everything possible" to boost household income Kishida last visited South Korea in May 2023 as part of the two East Asian neighbours' "shuttle diplomacy", or regular visits between the leaders in the wake of improved bilateral relations.—APP

## Solomon islands expected to call election for April

SYDNEY : The Solomon Islands is expected to next week call a national election for April, with China security ties emerging as a key issue as political parties launch campaigns in the Pacific Islands nation. Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare switched diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China soon after the 2019 election that brought him to power, later forging a security pact with Beijing that alarmed Washington and Canberra, and set off a race for influence in the strategically-located Pacific Islands. A prominent opposition party figure, the United Party's Peter Kenilorea, said he wanted the China security pact reviewed, and would also seek to re-establish diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the Solomon Star newspaper reported on Wednesday. Opposition leader Matthew Wale said at a campaign launch for a coalition of democratic parties on Wednesday that a referendum could be held to decide the Solomon Islands relationship with China. "China is a super power both militarily and economically, and there is much to be gained from a relationship with China... We need to see what our national interest is," Wale said at the livestreamed event.—APP

## UK inflation holds at 4.0 percent in Jan

LONDON: Britain's annual inflation rate remained unchanged in January from the previous month, confounding expectations for an acceleration, official data showed on Wednesday. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) stood at 4.0 percent last month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. That was double the Bank of England's target and beat expectations of an increase to 4.2 percent. The rate had unexpectedly picked up in December to 4.0 percent from 3.9 percent. The ONS added on Wednesday that food prices fell on a monthly basis for the first time since September 2022, and the largest downward push on inflation came from furniture and household goods. However, energy prices advanced more sharply than the same month a year earlier. "The price of gas and electricity rose at a higher rate than this time last year due to the increase in the energy price cap, while the cost of second-hand cars went up for the first time since May," said ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner.—DNA

## Türkiye, Egypt ready to coop to stop Gaza bloodshed

In a first for 12 years, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived in Egypt on Wednesday where his Egyptian counterpart el-Sissi personally welcomed him at the airport

## NEWS DESK

CAIRO: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Türkiye and Egypt are ready to cooperate to stop the bloodshed in Gaza amid Israel's incessant attacks, which have killed over 28,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children. Speaking at a joint news conference with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi in Cairo, Erdogan said the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza topped their agenda. He noted that the two countries are ready to rebuild Gaza, which has been destroyed in Israeli attacks. He also said Israel's attempts to expel Palestinians from their land in Gaza are "null and void." "We welcome Egypt's stance against Israel's attempts in this regard," he said, adding that they both highlighted the necessity of transporting humanitarian aid into Gaza, where over 1.5 million people are experiencing a humanitarian catastrophe — without disruptions. Erdogan noted that he was pleased to be back in Cairo, as he said they've taken steps to further strengthen Türkiye-Egypt ties at the presidential level. He also said the two countries were planning to boost energy and defense cooperation. For his part, el-Sissi also hailed ever-growing bilateral ties between Egypt and Türkiye. "We are proud of the current state of relations between the two countries," he said.



The two leaders signed the Joint Statement on Restructuring of High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council Meetings ahead of the joint news conference in Cairo. In a first for 12 years, President Erdogan

arrived in Egypt on Wednesday where his Egyptian counterpart el-Sissi personally welcomed him at the airport, breaking a tradition in honor of his guest. The visit caps diplomatic efforts in recent years to thaw the nations' frosty relations. They mutually appointed ambassadors last year, and this month, Türkiye said it would provide Egypt with armed drones. The two leaders fell out after Egypt's 2013 military coup that toppled President Mohamed Morsi. After the coup, diplomatic ties were downgraded although economic ties remained largely unharmed. Indeed, in 2022, Türkiye was the largest importer of Egyptian goods, totaling \$4 billion (TL 123 billion). In 2023, Cairo allowed Turkish citizens to obtain a visa on arrival, paving the way for advanced tourism. Normalization accelerated after Erdogan and el-Sissi shook hands in Doha at the World Cup in 2022 and gained further pace following the deadly February 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye, Erdogan's reelection in May and the appointment of ambassadors to each other's capitals in July. Since then, the two leaders met on the sidelines of the G-20 leaders summit in September and held conversations over the phone, particularly on the latest round of the Palestine-Israel conflict that broke out on Oct. 7. Cairo and Ankara have backed opposing factions in Libya's yet unresolved conflict, and also over maritime borders in the gas-rich Eastern Mediterranean. However, Türkiye has dismissed claims of a rivalry with Egypt in the region and reiterated willingness for more cooperation.

## NATO to showcase spending rise in riposte to Trump

## FOREIGN DESK

BRUSSELS: NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg will on Wednesday detail increased defence spending by members of the alliance, rattled after Donald Trump threatened to encourage Russia to attack countries paying too little. The Republican White House frontrunner was widely rebuked after saying he would not defend NATO members who had not met their financial obligations, in his most extreme broadside yet against the organisation. Trump's comments in a Saturday stump speech drew condemnation from leaders including US President Joe Biden —

whom he looks set to face in November's election — and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Scholz warned that casting doubt on NATO's collective defence guarantee which has safeguarded Europe since World War II was "irresponsible and dangerous". Ahead of a meeting of defence ministers, Stoltenberg is due to unveil new estimates showing the number of NATO allies reaching the military spending target of two percent of GDP has almost doubled since last year. Officials told AFP that around 20 of the alliance's 31 members are expected to hit the target, up from just 11 in 2023. NATO in 2014 set a target for members to spend two percent of their gross do-

mestic product on defence in response to Russia's seizure of Crimea from Ukraine. During his time as president, Trump railed against Washington's NATO allies to pressure them to spend more on defence — and he has claimed credit for increased spending. Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 served as a wake-up call for European countries and saw NATO turn the two-percent figure into a minimum requirement. EU council president denounces Trump's 'reckless' NATO threat Key players such as Germany have ramped up their defence spending and are expected to meet the target this year. But the US still accounts

for the vast bulk of combined defence spending by NATO members. Ukraine support Trump's broadside against US allies has raised the nightmarish spectre for European officials of Washington tanking the 75-year-old alliance if he is re-elected. It comes as warnings swirl that Russian President Vladimir Putin could look to target alliance members if Ukraine loses the war. Stoltenberg said any suggestions that allies won't defend each other "undermines all of our security" and puts US and European soldiers at greater risk. France said Europe needs another "life insurance" policy in addition to NATO to ensure the security of the continent.

## Situation at frontline 'extremely complex'

KYIV: Newly appointed Ukrainian military chief Oleksandr Syrsky said that the situation on the front line was precarious, following a visit to eastern Ukraine with Defence Minister Rustem Umerov. Russian forces over recent months have been pushing to capture the eastern industrial hub of Avdiivka, and have been claiming incremental gains in the costly battle. "The operational environment is extremely complex and stressful. The Russian occupiers continue to increase their efforts and have a numerical advantage in personnel," Syrsky said in a statement on social media. "We are doing everything possible to prevent the enemy from advancing deep into our territory and to hold the occupied positions," he added. Avdiivka lies in the Donetsk region of Ukraine, which has seen the worst fighting of Russia's nearly two-year offensive and is claimed by the Kremlin to be part of Russia. Syrsky said he and Umerov had also visited Ukrainian forces further north, near the town of Kupiansk, where Russian troops have been pressing Ukraine's positions. "Based on the results of the work, a number of important decisions were made aimed at strengthening the combat capabilities of our military units and preventing enemy actions," Syrsky said, without providing details.—DNA

## Pakistan urges resolution to end conflicts, occupation

Take action to stop the desecration of the Holy Quran, demolition of mosques, publication of blasphemous content, and allowing ethnic cleansing and mass murder of people of one particular faith

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has called for addressing situations of decades-old unresolved conflicts and foreign occupation — an obvious reference to Palestine and Kashmir — as part of efforts to combat violent extremism. In this regard, Pakistani delegate Muhammad Jawad Ajmal, speaking at an event marking International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, also urged reaffirmation by the world community of its commitment to promote peace, tolerance, inter-religious dialogue and countering hate speech. "Political and economic injustices have created polarization and fueled animosities," he told delegates at the event, which was organized by the Iraqi Mission to the UN on Tuesday. Reiterating Pakistan's condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, the Pakistani delegate noted that global landscape of the menace has evolved significantly in recent years. "Today," Ajmal said, "the world has failed to address the root causes of terrorism, including foreign occupation, denial of the inalienable right to self-determination, injustice, oppression and state terrorism. "We have also failed to address violent acts by white supremacist, far right extreme right wing, violent nationalist, xenophobic, Islamophobic, anti-Muslim and Hindutva groups and ideologies in various parts of the world," he added. "To combat violent extremism, we therefore need to comprehensively address not just the symptoms, but the root causes as well." In this context, Ajmal, the Pakistani delegate, highlighted five points: — The practice of insulting any religion and acts of hate and violence on the basis of religion or belief must be universally outlawed; — The UN must make appropriate changes in its counter-terrorism architecture and sanctions regimes to cover new and emerging forms of terrorism like right wing and Islamophobic extremism and terrorism; — Ensure that the fight against counter terrorism is not misused to violate human rights. — Take action to stop the desecration of the Holy Quran, demolition of mosques, publication of blasphemous content, and allowing ethnic cleansing and mass murder of people of one particular faith. — The UN General Assembly establish a body to promote the universal consideration and balanced implementation of all four pillars of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy.— Agencies



BRUSSELS: Ambassador Amna Baloch met with Singapore Ambassador H.E. Lim Hong Huai. Discussed regional and global matters of interest & agreed to strengthen Pakistan and Singapore cooperation in Brussels.—DNA

## Hungary expected to approve Swedish NATO bid

OSLO : Sweden's foreign minister said on Wednesday that he expects that Hungary will soon approve the Swedish NATO membership application. "We welcome that Turkey has completed its ratification process, and expect Hungary to follow shortly," Tobias Billstrom said in a speech to parliament. Hungary is the only NATO member that has not approved Sweden's application to join the alliance, with the ruling nationalists citing what they call undue Swedish allegations that they have eroded democracy in Hungary. Meanwhile, The parliament of Hungary called a special session to deliberate Sweden's accession into the Nato alliance. However, the ruling Fidesz party boycotted the accession vote, with their majority ensuring the vote will not pass. This comes despite significant pressure on Hungary to pass the resolution, with the US Ambassador to Hungary and senior Nato representatives all present in the Hungarian Parliament to witness the result. Nato accession rules require unanimous approval by all existing alliance members for a new state to join. Hungary is the last remaining Nato member to approve of Sweden's application, clearing the way for Sweden's official acceptance. Hungary is currently considered to be the EU and Nato state with the friendliest relations with Russia. Hungarian Prime Minister and Fidesz party leader Viktor Orbán's public position is that because Hungary is a small nation in Central Europe, it must pursue potential friendly relations and potential business partners in both the East and West. Additionally, Orbán is considered to have a close personal relationship to Vladimir Putin. Regardless of the reason, Hungary has repeatedly stalled on approving Sweden's Nato application. Fidesz representatives have cited retaliation for the EU freezing developmental funds for Hungary in 2023, which was in response to concerns over infringement on rule-of-law and high corruption levels in Hungary.—Agencies

## Peru President appoints new economy, energy chiefs

LIMA : Peruvian President Dina Boluarte named replacements for four key members of her cabinet, including a new economy chief as well as a new energy and mining minister, with both set to face a fragile economy that last year dipped into recession. Boluarte, president of the South American nation since late 2022, made the announcements in a televised ceremony from capital Lima. Economist Jose Arista was named to succeed outgoing Economy Minister Alex Contreras, who announced his resignation in a post on social media.—APP

## Storms leave 174,000 homes powerless in Australia

MELBOURNE: Storms packing powerful winds toppled trees, killed one person and knocked out power to 174,000 homes and businesses in eastern Australia, officials said Wednesday. The wild weather hit large swathes of Victoria on Tuesday, dumping torrents of rain and unleashing gusts of more than 150 kilometres per hour (90 miles per hour), the state government and emergency services said. A 50-year-old man was killed in the storm, dying on the scene after being struck by debris while working on his property in Darlimurla, southeast of Melbourne, Victoria police said in a statement. The winds also fanned bushfires in the Grampians region west of Melbourne, burning an unknown number of homes in one small town, the state's Country Fire Authority said. At its peak, 530,000 homes and businesses lost power, the Australian Energy Market Operator said in an update. About 174,000 were still cut off on Wednesday afternoon, it said.—Agencies

## Turkmenistan faces 'parallel reality' media landscape

"We know about Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. But we can't access them — everything here is blocked," said Byashim Ishanguliyev, a fruit seller in the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat

## AFP/APP

ASHGABAT : We know about Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. But we can't access them — everything here is blocked," said Byashim Ishanguliyev, a fruit seller in the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat. To keep information from the outside world hidden from its citizens, Turkmenistan, one of the world's most closed and isolated countries, exercises almost total control over the internet. Getting round the ban is no small feat. "Some people manage to connect to a VPN, but that's only temporary, it will also be blocked," 19-year-old Ishanguliyev told AFP at a market in Ashgabat, referring to a Virtual Private Network. "Plus the internet is slow. So if somebody manages to download an interesting video, clip or

film, we all watch it together," he said. Despite the effectiveness of the Turkmen firewall, the regime is constantly stepping up measures to prevent outside information seeping into the energy-rich Central Asian nation. President Serdar Berdimukhamedov last month announced his intention to "strengthen the country's cybersecurity". Berdimukhamedov, in power since 2022 — the country's third leader since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 — has followed in his predecessors' footsteps in exerting maximum control. His father, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, previously ruled the ex-Soviet country for 15 years with an iron fist. Alongside social media, services like WhatsApp, Viber, Signal and Telegram are also blocked. Instead, Turkmenistan has Bizbarde, a local messenger under the gov-

ernment's control. For video, the authorities have launched Belet, a YouTube alternative purged of any content — both news and entertainment — that could show what life is like beyond the isolated country's borders. "There is no media landscape," said Ruslan Myatiev, whose Turkmen.News site is blocked inside the country. At home, the Turkmen population see nothing but "propaganda to promote the cult of personality of the Berdimukhamedovs — father and son," the Netherlands-based Myatiev said. "To prevent this parallel reality created by the media from collapsing, the rulers block the internet," he added. All media outlets inside the country are state-owned. They only broadcast official news, reporting heavily on people offering their praise and thanks to the Berdimukhamedov regime. "Turkmen television is

very boring, not informative, with the same shows over and over again," said Yusup Bakhshiyev, a 38-year-old civil servant who lives in the capital. He used to be able to watch some foreign channels via a satellite link. But that is no longer possible. "Some local officials came to my house and told me to remove the satellite dish, as it was spoiling the architecture of the town," he told AFP. After that, he subscribed to Turkmen cable TV. "The state controls the information and it receives income from the subscription," he said. Some Western channels — including France 24, BBC and Euronews — are authorised. But in a country where English is hardly spoken, their audience is minimal. On their TV screens, Turkmen see endless footage of President Berdimukhamedov in action — reprimanding sheepish govern-

ment ministers, planting trees in the desert, or receiving rapturous applause. His father, who has the official title of Hero-Protector — or "Arkadag" in Turkmen — maintains immense privileges and is still the subject of an intense personality cult. He is often filmed at sports events, holding weapons or playing instruments. Sometimes the absurdity spills towards the extreme. The Arkadag newspaper recently reported that Gurbanguly travelled to Arkadag — a town named in his honour — to congratulate the players of the local football team, named Arkadag. Behind the carefully controlled headlines lies a country with a bleak human rights record. The Freedom House NGO ranks Turkmenistan among the "worst of the worst" for political freedoms and civil liberties.

## Briefs

### PML-N eyes to form govt in Balochistan

DNA

QUETTA: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was eyeing to form government in Balochistan as the party secured 10 National Assembly (NA) seats in February 8 general elections. The provincial leadership of PML-N held first consultative meeting after the elections – which was chaired by party's Balochistan president Sheikh Jaffar Mandokhail. The meeting was also attended by victorious candidates. The PML-N also speeded up contacts with the victorious independent candidates. Taking to X (Formerly Twitter), former chief minister Jam Kamal said that PML-N had secured ten seats in Balochistan. "We are meeting and interacting with independent members and rest parties so that a progressive and prosperous way forward can be made for Balochistan," he added. The Election Commission of Pakistan had announced the results of all the 16 National Assembly seats from Balochistan – ranging from NA-251 to NA-266. According to Form 47 of each constituency uploaded on the ECP's website, the winning candidate for NA-251 is PNP Chairman Khushhal Khan Kakar, whereas Sardar Yaqoob Khan Nasir of PML-N has won from NA-252, independent candidate Mian Khan Bugti from NA-253, BAP President Mir Khalid Hussain Magsi from NA-254, Mir Khan Muhammad Jamali of PML-N from NA-255, BNP-M President Akhtar Mengal from NA-256, and Jam Mir Kamal Khan Alyani of PML-N from NA-257.

### Ijazul Haq meets with Ch. Shujaat

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid President Chaudhry Shujaat Husain says concerted efforts are required to steer the country towards prosperity. He shared his view during a meeting with PML-Z chief Ijazul Haq at his (Shujaat's) residence. The two leaders discussed the political developments in the country. Later, Chaudhry Shujaat, along with Ijazul Haq, told a press conference that consultation among politicians was under way. Ijazul Haq said he had a cordial meeting with Chaudhry Shujaat "who is like an elder brother". He said he had felicitated the veteran politician on electoral success and discussed prospects of government formation. He said it's important who could be the ideal choice to pull the country out of quagmire. "We have sought some time and will adopt any course of action after consultation with the party leaders," he added.

# Indonesian ex-general claims presidential race victory

Rivals Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo had about 25% and 17% respectively, according to the independent pollsters that were conducting "quick counts" at the close of voting

DNA

JAKARTA: Unofficial tallies in Indonesia's presidential election on Wednesday showed Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto taking a commanding lead that could see him win in a single round if sustained. Prabowo had about 58% of votes according to four pollsters, based on ballots counted in a sample of voting stations nationwide. The number of votes they had tallied ranged from about 52% to 67% as of 0912 GMT. Rivals Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo had about 25% and 17% respectively, according to the independent pollsters that were conducting "quick counts" at the close of voting. Counts by reputable outlets have proven to be accurate in previous elections. An official result is not expected until several weeks after the vote. The pattern could signal a first round win for Prabowo. To win in a single round, a candidate needs more than 50% of votes cast and 20% of the ballot in half of the country's provinces. If no candidate wins a majority, a runoff between the top two finishers will be held in June. The contest pits popular former governors Ganjar and Anies against the pre-election frontrunner Prabowo, a former special forces commander feared in the 1990s as a top lieutenant of Indonesia's late strongman ruler Suharto. "Alhamdulillah (Praise be to God), we hope the election can go in one round," said Nusron Wahid, secretary of Prabowo's campaigning team, commenting on the latest quick counts. The world's biggest single-day election has included nearly 259,000 candidates vying for 20,600 posts across the archipelago of 17,000 islands, but the focus has been firmly on the race to replace President Joko Widodo, opens new tab, whose influence could determine who takes the helm of the world's



**JAKARTA: Sitting President of Indonesia casts his vote in the Presidential elections of Indonesia 2024. – DNA**

third-largest democracy. The early lead will be a big boost for Prabowo, who has undergone an image rebrand and is contesting his third successive election after twice losing out to the hugely popular Widodo, who cannot run again because of term limits. Jokowi, as the incumbent is known, is tacitly backing and betting on his former rival as a continuity candidate to preserve his legacy, including a role for his son Gibran Rakabuming Raka as Prabowo's running mate. Two surveys issued last week gave Prabowo just over 50% support, with Anies and Ganjar 27 and 31 points adrift, respectively, though the quick counts point to a stronger lead. "This is an emphatic result that diminishes prospects for legal challenges and will also provide the Widodo-Prabowo alliance with an element of

affirmation from the public for decision-making in the months ahead," said political analyst Kevin O'Rourke. Former Jakarta governor Anies and ex-Central Java governor Ganjar had been trying to woo undecided voters to try to force a runoff in June. "I want to underline that we want honest and fair elections so that it becomes peaceful," Anies said at a polling station. Deadly riots broke out after the 2019 election, when Prabowo had initially contested Jokowi's victory. "So far, the situation is safe, under control," said National Police Chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo. Anies has campaigned on promises of change and preventing a backsliding in the democratic reforms achieved in the 25 years since the end of Suharto's authoritarian, kleptocratic rule. Ganjar hails from the Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle, of which Jokowi is ostensibly a member, and has campaigned largely on continuing the president's policies, but crucially lacks his endorsement. Before voting, he also called for a clean election so that candidates could accept the result. Hastu Kristiyanto, a senior politician in his campaign team said there had been many reports of alleged cheating in Central Java and East Java and some intimidation. Prabowo said on Wednesday he hoped the "voting process goes well". In later comments, made as he was treading water in a swimming pool in his private residence near Jakarta, the wealthy 72-year-old businessman told reporters he wanted to defend truth, eliminate corruption and ensure no one in Indonesia went hungry. "I want there to be no 70-year-old people still driving rickshaws. That's my wish," he said. Reporting by Gayatri Suryo, Fransiska Nangoy, Bernadette Christina Munthe, Stanley Widianto, Ananda Teresia; Writing by Martin Petty and Ed Davies; Editing by Raju Gopalakrishnan.

### Yasmin Rashid hits out at PML-N

ABUJID RAZA

LAHORE: Dr Yasmin Rashid, the leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and former provincial health minister, on Wednesday took a dig at PML-N by asking its leaders to be ashamed of their conduct in general elections. Speaking outside the Lahore anti-terrorism court, she accused the PML-N of looting public money and said they were now attempting to steal the public mandate through rigging. She asked the PML-N to respect the public mandate, emphasising that the nation had made its decision on Feb 8 by voting for PTI-backed independent candidates. She issued a warning to the victorious PTI-backed independent candidates, advising them against joining any other party or forming alliances. She emphasised that the nation would neither forget nor forgive them if they betrayed the voters. Dr Rashid also lauded the loyal and enthusiastic supporters who voted for the party in an atmosphere of fear and injustice. She highlighted the challenges such as deprivation of the electoral symbol, restrictions on election campaign, and obstruction of the PTI's path in various ways.

### India police tear gas again at farmer protesters

NEW DELHI: Indian police have used tear gas and water cannon for a second day to stop farmers demanding minimum crop prices from marching on the capital Delhi. The capital is ringed by razor wire, cement blocks and fencing on three sides to block their entry. Mostly from Punjab state, the farmers are still 200km (125 miles) from Delhi - thousands of security forces are deployed to block their way. Farmers say the government broke its word after protests two years ago. In 2020, farmers blockaded national highways around the capital - their year-long protest was a major challenge and forced the authorities to roll back controversial agriculture reforms, but farmers say other demands have not been met. The government has invited farm leaders to hold talks. The new protests come months before general elections in which the governing BJP of PM Narendra Modi is seeking a third consecutive term.

### Sher Afzal Marwat claims Zardari contact, PPP denies

PTI leader reiterates Imran Khan's steadfast stance against cooperating with 'mandate stealers'

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat has made startling claims regarding discussions with former president Asif Ali Zardari, suggesting a potential alliance between their parties to form the government. Marwat revealed this information to the media, claiming the PPP leader was in touch with him until Tuesday night and indicating a political alliance with the PTI instead of the PML-N. Speaking outside the Election Commission of Pakistan, Marwat detailed the communication he had with Zardari, emphasizing that he would inform the founder of PTI, Imran Khan, about the situation imminently. However, he also reiterated Imran Khan's steadfast stance against cooperating with "mandate stealers", signalling potential obstacles to any proposed alliance with Zardari's party. Marwat's statements also shed light on PTI's internal dynamics, with him saying that party leader Ali Amin Gandapur has been chosen by Imran Khan to represent the party. This indicates PTI's strategic considerations in navigating post-election negotiations and alliances. Additionally, Marwat raised concerns about alleged electoral malpractice, particularly in Karachi, where PTI purportedly secured victories in all 17 contested constituencies. He criticized the ECP for what he deemed a failure to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process, accusing them of allowing the "integrity of Pakistan" to be compromised. He further remarked that the PML-N won five constituencies in the entire country, and questioned how party supremo Nawaz Sharif can deliver a victory speech in such a situation.



**ISLAMABAD: Chief of JUI (F) Maulana Fazl ur Rehman holding a press conference along with other party leaders. (News on Page 01) – DNA**

# Ukraine claims sinking of Russian ship off Crimea

KIEV: A big Russian amphibious ship, the Caesar Kunikov, has been sunk off the coast of Russian-occupied Crimea, according to Ukraine's armed forces. Powerful explosions were heard early on Wednesday, according to local social media, which suggested the landing ship was hit south of the town of Yalta. Ukraine's intelligence directorate released video of what it said were Magura V5 sea drones striking the ship. Ukraine has repeatedly hit Russia's Black Sea fleet in occupied Crimea. Satellite images last year showed much of the fleet had left the peninsula for the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. Ahead of a Nato ministerial meeting in Brussels, the secretary general of the Western defensive alliance, Jens Stoltenberg, said Ukrainian forces had won a "great victory" in recent months, inflicting "heavy losses" on the Black Sea fleet that had opened a corridor for Ukrainian grain exports. Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine is due to enter its third year next week and Ukraine's armed forces chief has admitted the situation is "extremely complex and tense". Col Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi, who was appointed commander-in-chief last week, visited the front line on Wednesday and promised that units trying to prevent Russian troops from capturing the flashpoint town of Avdiivka would be reinforced. Avdiivka is almost empty and all but surrounded by Russian forces and one of the soldiers defending it said

earlier that the situation there was critical. "We are doing everything possible to prevent the enemy from advancing deep into our territory," he wrote on social media. Overnight, a Russian missile attack claimed three lives including a child in the mining town of Selydove, 40km (25 miles) west of Avdiivka. Officials said four missiles had hit the local hospital and maternity ward, as well as nine blocks of flats. Several other residents were wounded, including a baby. There was no confirmation from Russia's navy that the Caesar Kunikov had been sunk in the Black Sea, merely that six Ukrainian drones had been destroyed. Video appearing to show the aftermath of the Ukrainian attack was uploaded only recently. "The Caesar Kunikov suffered critical holes in its port side and began to sink," Ukraine's main intelligence directorate said on the Telegram messaging site, adding that it had been destroyed off the Crimean coastal town of Alupka in Ukrainian territorial waters by a unit called Group 13. The Magura V5 unmanned drones it said were used in the attack are made in Ukraine and travel just above the sea surface at a speed up to 42 nautical miles an hour, their manufacturer says. Amphibious ships are used to move assault troops to land quickly, especially in enemy territory. Russia has also used landing ships in recent years to ferry military supplies to Syria, in support of Bashar al-Assad's government. – Agencies

# Israeli occupation forces continue killing Gazans in Rafah

## Four Lebanese killed in Israeli attacks

FOREIGN DESK

BEIRUT: Four Lebanese people have been killed and nine others have been injured in two Israeli attacks on Wednesday as part of Israeli ongoing aggression against southern Lebanon. The Civil Defense in southern Lebanon announced that the Israeli army targeted the towns of Al-Sawaneh and Edsheet in southern Lebanon with two airstrikes, resulting in the martyrdom of four people and the injury of nine others. Earlier on Wednesday, a female Jewish settler was killed and seven others were injured in a strike launched from southern Lebanon on the city of Safad in northern 1948 Occupied Palestine (Israel). Israeli Channel 14 reported that the bombing that targeted the city of Safad in the Upper Galilee has left one dead. The Israeli Broadcasting Authority said that five people were taken to hospital in Safad following a rocket attack on the city, while Israeli ambulance crews said that the number of the injured in the attack has risen to seven including three seriously injured. Israeli media reported that a building was directly hit in the city of Safad as a result of rockets fired from Lebanon. The Lebanese Hezbollah used accurate missiles in its bombing of the city of Safad in the Upper Galilee and the Iron Dome failed to intercept the last missile, the media report added. The Israeli army radio indicated that it detected eight missiles launched from Lebanon towards Safad.

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 131 on Wednesday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound neighborhoods, homes and shelter centers and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza, mainly Rafah and Khan Yunis, killing and injuring hundreds of citizens. According to media sources, a number of civilians were injured in an Israeli artillery attack on an area in the east of al-Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza. The Israeli army also bombed a house in al-Jala street in Gaza City, killing three civilians, including journalist Aymen al-Rafati. Israeli warplanes attacked the eastern area of Abasan al-Kabira town in Khan Yunis and the east of Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, wounding several civilians. Two martyrs were reportedly evacuated from an area near Wadi Gaza area in central Gaza following an Israeli attack. Other casualties were reported in different areas of Gaza following Israeli aerial, artillery and shooting attacks last night and today. Meanwhile, about 100 displaced citizens, mostly women and children, in al-Hurani School for Girls in western Khan Yunis appealed for urgent efforts to evacuate them from the area, which is under Israeli siege, saying they have no food or water. For its part, the health ministry in Gaza said on Wednesday that the Israeli occupation army committed 11 new massacres in different areas of the Gaza Strip during the past 24 hours, killing at least 103 civilians and injuring over 145 others, while a large number of victims are still under the rubble of bombed buildings or lying on roads. In a statement, the health ministry added that the death toll from the ongoing Israeli bombardments, which started on October 7, climbed to 28,576 martyrs and the number of the wounded surged to 68,291 people. Yesterday, the health ministry said that the Israeli army massacred 133 civilians and injured 162 within 24 hours in different areas of Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants to prolong the war on Gaza for his "personal career and personal future", according to the Palestinian Authority's Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki. In a meeting with his Cypriot counterpart in Nicosia, al-Maliki said, "It is very clear that he doesn't care about the destiny, the lives, of innocent people both in Israel and in Palestine, the Israeli hostages and the Palestinian innocent people in Gaza." "This is something we should deplore and we should really stand against," he added. "It is our collective responsibility to prevent further escalation [and] prolongation of the war, to open other fronts, either in the West Bank or in south Lebanon."

NEWS DESK

**MURREE SPARKLETTS**  
Bottled Drinking Water

**WATER TASTES BEST IN GLASS!!**

CARBONATED WATER ALSO AVAILABLE IN GLASS BOTTLE

330ml, 750ml

For Sales & Supply Contact:

Rizi Abbas 03325599169  
Kaiser Wahed 03325808422  
Riaz Muhammad 0335 5111043