



Islamabad POST

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Zelensky signs 'historic' security pact with Germany

Detailed News On Page-07

Mushahid applauds Putin's stance on Islamophobia

Detailed News On Page-08



Ashwin joins elite company after 500 wickets

Detailed News On Page-06



Amid political unrest

'Martial law or emergency may be an option'

Grand Democratic Alliance leader Pir Pagara has alleged that the result of the general elections was "already sold three months back and the payment was made too"

NAZIR SIYAL / DNA

JAMSHORO: In a sweeping statement, Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) chief Pir Pagara has said that he believes an "emergency or martial law" can be imposed in the country, while the judiciary will grant it legal cover as his party protests against the "rigged" February 8 general elections. "Army has tested everyone now [...] no one can take control of federation except military," he added. GDA leader Pir Pagara has questioned the Election Commission of Pakistan for being missing in action and called on it to take notice of the alleged rigging in the general elections. He questioned whether politicians before PTI founder Imran Khan had not taken state gifts from the Toshakhana despite it being illegal. "In my view Imran Khan is not a thief, yes there could have been a mistake ... but he is not a thief," he said. Grand Democratic Alliance leader Pir Pagara has alleged that the result of the general elections was "already sold three months back and the payment was made too". Addressing a party power show in Jamshoro, he said the election had proved that no political leader or party were prevalent at the national level but reduced to provincial levels. "Our protest is against the snatching of our mandate." GDA leader Pir Pagara has asserted that the upcoming government will not last beyond eight to 10 months as per his information. "What has happened because of the sky-high inflation during the past 20 months of government? The middle class is being eliminated. Inflation will touch the sky after this inflation and the middle class will be wiped out." GDA leader Pir Pagara has lauded the performance of PTI-backed independent candidates in the general elections, adding that

Continued on Page 06

Petition seeking to annul polls fixed for hearing

Based on rigging allegations, the petitioner has sought to hold elections again

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Friday fixed a petition seeking to nullify the February 8 general elections for hearing on February 19 (Monday). A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa will hear the plea. The bench will include Justice Musarrat Hilali and Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar as well. The top court has issued a notice to the complainant, Ali Khan. Based on rigging allegations, the petitioner has sought to hold elections again. Several political parties including Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) have levelled allegations of rigging in the general elections. The final results of

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar chairs a review meeting regarding Karachi Electric. - DNA

PTI to play 'opposition's' role in Centre, Punjab

Saif says PTI took this decision as it wants "harmony" in country

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: As the political uncertainty about who will form the government in the light of February 8 general election continues, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Friday announced that it would form the opposition in the Centre and Punjab as per party founder Imran Khan's directives. PTI leader Barrister Saif, while speaking to journalists after a meeting with Quami Watan Party (QWP) in Islamabad, said that PTI has decided to sit on the opposition benches in the National Assembly and Punjab Assembly. "Many politicians face the allegations that they have

Continued on Page 06

SJC decides not to summon Naqvi's sons

The SJC adjourned further proceedings indefinitely

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) has decided not to summon sons of former Supreme Court judge Mazahir Ali Akbar Naqvi as witnesses in a case of misconduct against him. During its proceedings on Friday, the SJC directed the Attorney General for Pakistan to withdraw the notices to the extent of Mazahir Naqvi's sons. The open meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council was held under the chairmanship of Chief Justice

Continued on Page 06

Assault on democracy February 8 polls biggest voter fraud in history

PTI was deprived of 85 NA seats by stealing the public mandate in the midnight robbery

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Despite having the largest number of successful candidates in the February 8 general elections, the Imran Khan-founded Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Friday disapproved of the polls results, saying that "records of rigging were set" in the electoral process. PTI spokesperson Rauf Hassan said that the 2024 elections would be remembered in the country's history due to the scale of rigging.

PICTURE ON PAGE 02

The statements came during a press conference in Islamabad today, where a large number of PTI-backed independent candidates had come claiming to be possessing Form 45s that showed them victors. Pakistan staged the biggest election of its history on February 8, which was extraordinary in various aspects. However, the outcome of the polls did not turn out to be as

Continued on Page 06

Imran seeking US 'interference' on polls: PML-N

Marriyum reminds Imran of his 'Absolutely Not', 'We are not slaves' slogans

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb stated on Friday that former premier Imran Khan inviting the US to interfere in the country's elections goes against Pakistan's sovereignty. Addressing a press conference along with party leader Attaullah Tarar, she questioned where Imran's

Continued on Page 06

Putin critic Alexei Navalny 'dies' in jail

Navalny was serving a 19-year jail term on charges widely considered politically motivated

AGENCIES

MOSCOW: Russia's most significant opposition leader for the past decade, Alexei Navalny, has died in an Arctic Circle jail, the prison service said. Seen as President Vladimir Putin's most vociferous critic, Navalny was serving a 19-year jail term on charges widely considered politically motivated. He was moved to one of Russia's toughest penal colonies late last year. The prison service in the Yamalo-Nenets



Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Omer Ayub granted bail in all cases

Awan said his client was implicated in around 50 cases

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court has granted protective bails to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) secretary general Omer Ayub in all cases registered against him. The court heard the security and transit bail of Ayub who was present in the court with his lawyer Babar Awan. Awan said his client was implicated in around 50 cases and he was a contender for the seat of prime minister of Pakistan. The court granting Ayub bails in all cases directed him to appear before all courts in one month.

No trust vote due to PTI's behaviour

PTI govt's dictatorial behavior was cause of no-confidence motion

BUREAU REPORT

QUETTA: Baluchistan National Party (BNP) chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government's dictatorial behavior was the cause of no-confidence motion against it. In a statement in response to Maulana Fazlur Rehman's revelations, he said PTI's behaviour forced all parties to come together.

Holiday Notice

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

EIU Democracy Index

Pak now classified as 'authoritarian regime'

Pakistan's score on Democracy Index fell by 0.88 to 3.25, resulting in fall of 11 places in global ranking table

DNA

LONDON: Pakistan has been downgraded to an "authoritarian regime" in the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Democracy Index 2023 report, registering the greatest deterioration of any country in the region classified as "Australia and Asia". The EIU Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of democracy in 165 independent states and two territories. Of the 28 countries in the region that are included in the index, 15 recorded a decline in their score and only eight registered an improvement. Pakistan's score on the Democracy Index fell by 0.88 to 3.25, resulting in a fall of 11 places in the global ranking table, to 118th. The EIU report mentioned that alongside meddling in the electoral process and government dysfunction, the independence of the judiciary has been severely curtailed in the country. Pakistan is the only Asian country to be downgraded, having been reclassified from a "hybrid regime" to an

"authoritarian regime". Pakistan's score on the democracy index remained a little over 4 since 2008. It was for the first in 2023 that the country's score tumbled to 3.25 during the coalition government primarily comprising of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Jamaat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F). Interestingly, Pakistan's 2023 score on the democracy index is even worse than 2006 (3.92) when military ruler Gen (ret) Pervez Musharraf was at the helm of the affairs. Speaking to Geo.tv, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (Pildat) Ahmed Bilal Mehboob termed Pakistan's downgrading as "disappointing". "This is a very disappointing development as Pakistan has scored the lowest since 2017 and our category has also been downgraded from a hybrid regime" to an authoritarian regime," he added. He also urged all stakeholders to "undertake serious soul searching at this state of affairs".

Continued on Page 06

'Bajwa urged withdrawal of no trust vote against Imran'

Fazl had said: "They (Bajwa and Faiz) were in contact with all political parties regarding the no-confidence motion and they told us the way of going about it"

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: PML-N leader Malik Ahmad Khan said on Friday that former army chief retired General Qamar Javed Bajwa had advised the then-opposition to withdraw the vote of no-confidence (VONC) against former prime minister Imran Khan. His statement comes a day after Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman claimed that Gen Bajwa and ex-spymaster Lt Gen Faiz Hameed, who was the then-Peshawar corps commander, had orchestrated the no-trust motion that resulted in Imran's ouster in April 2022. Pakistan had seen for the first time in its history the ouster of a prime minister through a VONC, the efforts for which were led by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of parties led by the PML-N. For its part, the PTI accused the PDM of colluding with the US and hatching a regime change conspiracy to topple Imran's government and blamed the military, which was

Continued on Page 06

Fazl benefited most from no-confidence motion: Kundi

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Secretary Information Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Faisal Karim Kundi Friday said that Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (Faiz) (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazl ur Rehman had benefited the most from no-confidence motion against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led government. Addressing a press conference here along with PPP leaders Nadeem Afzal Chan and Syed Sibtain Haider Bukhari, he said the JUI-F chief was the head of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) at the time and could have stopped the no-confidence move. He termed the meeting between a delegation of PTI and the JUI

Continued on Page 06

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RCCI urge govt to withdraw gas price hike

DNA

RAWALPINDI : The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has rejected the massive increase of 65% in gas tariffs and urged the Government to withdraw gas price hike. RCCI President Saqib Rafiq in a statement said that the government has increased the gas prices for the second time in just four months and termed it disastrous for industries. He said that the ECC decision also put an unreasonable burden on a class of residential consumers using more than 2 cubic hectometers (Hm³) gas. He urged the government to reconsider the decision, pointing out that in developed countries, utilities were not exploited for economic gains. Saqib Rafiq emphasised the need to negotiate sustainable energy tariffs with the IMF and rationalise cross subsidies on industrial energy tariffs to support growth. He further added that this is the second time, Government has increased the gas tariff, yet the circular debt is increasing.—APP

Governor inaugurates Keamari-Boat Basin road

KARACHI : Sindh Governor Muhammad Kamran Tessori on Friday inaugurated the Keamari-Boat Basin road constructed by the Karachi Port Trust (KPT). The chairman of KPT and other senior officers were also present in the ceremony held here at Karachi Port Trust. Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said the road project will prove to be a milestone for the commercial activities of the business of the port.

The governor said the road project was proof of the permanent efforts of the KPT chairman. He said this road will make it easy to do port businesses and also resolve traffic jam issues of the port consumers. Tessori said this project is the basic need of the people of Karachi as KPT is one of the major institutions of Pakistan which boosts the country's economy. The chairman of KPT said the Sindh Governor was working for the uplift of the people of the province.

SCCI urges govt to review raise in gas price

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) on Friday urged the government to review the recent raise in electricity, gas and fuel prices to bring economic stability in the country. The hike in gas tariff would adversely affect the industry and commercial sectors along with business, trade and industrial growth, SCCI President Fuad Ishaq said in a statement. He said that all the industries were using gas, electricity and fuel, and increase in their prices would jack up cost of industrial products, which could directly affect the poor masses and economy. He said the transportation charges would also be increased owing to the hike in fuel prices that could push up prices of essential items.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Leaders of PTI addressing a press conference in Islamabad.—Photo Mudassar Raja

PCFA-KP & KPEZDMC celebrate Chinese spring festival at RSEZ

Extending greetings and best wishes to the Chinese community based in RSEZ which is being leased CRBC for 30 years

NOWSHERA : The Pakistan-China Friendship Association (PCFA) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province Pakistan & Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development & Management Company (KPEZDMC) celebrates the Chinese Spring Festival 2024 at Rashakhi Special Economic Zone (RSEZ) the flagship Economic Zone under CPEC. Extending Greetings & Best Wishes to the Chinese Community based in RSEZ which is being leased to China Road & Bridge Corporation (CRBC) for

30 years, the PCFA-KP Secretary General Syed Ali Nawaz Gilani said we at Pakistan joining our Chinese Friends on the Happy occasion and extending Greetings as we share our great & valuable time tested friendship. PCFA-KP since 1970, is doing their best to further strengthening Sino Pakistan Relations in all fields of life. The visionary Chinese leadership & Peoples under the President Xi Jinping are achieving new heights of economic & social prosperity this is the high time that we

should learn lesson from the success of China and Understanding China is need of the hour. The event was also attended by Mr. Adil Salahuddin Chief Commercial Officer KPEZDMC Mr. Gouhong Beng Deputy Project Head CRBC for RESZ, Mr. Ahsan Laiq Siddique Zonal Manager, Engr. Sardar Ali Energy & Power Officer, Mr. Ashraf Hayat Director Utilities CRBC, Mr. Bilal Durraani Joint Secretary PCFA-KP. Speaking on the occasion Mr. Adil Salahuddin CCO KPEZDMC

congratulates the Chinese Friends on behalf of Mr. Javed Khatrak Chief Executive Officer KPEZDMC & all team members and ensure all support in economic developmental activities and initiatives to be taken in best interest of industrial & economic development of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. He also thanks PCFA-KP for this friendly gesture to celebrate Chinese Spring Festival 2024 mentioned that these friendly initiatives bring both nation closer. Mr.

Gouhong Beng, Deputy Project Head CRBC at RSEZ appreciate the gesture of PCFA-KP & said we are close friends and our friendship is named as Iron brothers by Chinese leadership. He also thanks to KPEZDMC for extending all support in their activities and achievements in the RSEZ. The Chinese Spring Festival 2024 cake cutting was jointly held by Participants & later on Souvenirs were presented by PCFA-KP to the Chinese & KPEZDMC officials.

Financial crisis hit printing of textbook in KP

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : As a result of the financial crisis in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there is a fear that the matter of printing textbooks will go unchecked and it will not be possible to provide books to the students of the government schools of the province in time. The publishers who printed the textbooks during the last academic year have been demanded to pay the arrears of Rs. 2.5 billion. The publishers

have stopped the printing of textbooks for the next academic year 2024-25, an official of the Text Book Board told APP on the condition of not being named. He said as a result of stopping the printing, it will not be possible to provide books to the students of the government schools of the province in time. He disclosed that the finance department has been contacted several times for the provision of funds but the Finance Department's insistence to

leave the issue of release of funds to the next government. The caretaker government has decided to give free books to the government schools of the province during the next academic year 2024-25, the official added. He said Punjab and KP Publishers were awarded contracts for printing of new books and also signed an agreement with them but due to no payment of arrears of more than Rs. Billion they stop working on the printing of Textbooks.

Textbook Board is bound to pay 50% to the respective publishers under CAPRA rules, 50% on completion of work and 50% on printing of complete books, he added. The printing of the books has to be completed by March 20, while April 20 is the deadline for giving the books to the districts for distribution, the official said. He said that free books will be provided to children in April but so far no possibility of distributing the textbooks to government schools in time.

IG Punjab cracks down on unlicensed drivers

LAHORE : IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar on Friday issued a special message from Aab'shar Khidmat Center, that strict legal action will be taken against motorists who do not have license. He said all obstacles in issuing driving license online have been removed, adding that more than 34 laws in this regard have been amended. The IG Punjab declared that any vehicle driven by an individual without a license would face strict action and directed concerned authorities to gear up their action. On this occasion, additional IG Traffic Mirza Faran Baig said that in a few weeks 1 crore 24 lakh citizens have got their driving licenses, adding, "We have made all the license centers and traffic offices friendly for the citizens." Earlier on, Punjab police's special branch launched AIRS Additional IG Special Branch Punjab Zulfiqar Hameed has said that several steps are underway for digitalization and to increase the operational efficiency of the Special Branch, in continuation of which the Automatic Intelligence Reporting System (AIRS) has been inaugurated. This modern intelligence system has been prepared by Special Branch Punjab in collaboration with private company (Confiz). Additional IG Special Branch Zulfiqar Hameed has said that the launch of Automated Intelligence Reporting System (AIRS) is a good initiative of the Special Branch with support of private company (Confiz), this modern system (AIRS) data bank will help in preparation of special branch analytical reports. Additional IG Special Branch Zulfiqar Hameed said that the use of Automated Intelligence Reporting System (AIRS) will play a key role in making intelligence reporting more efficient in the future, Intelligence Reporting System (AIRS) will further upgrade the functioning of the Special Branch in the ever-changing landscape of intelligence reporting. CEO Confiz Hashim Ali said that digitization of Special Branch and launch of Automated Intelligence Reporting System (AIRS) will further improve the working of this important organization.—DNA

CM inaugurates children hospital's upgraded OPD

CM Naqvi remarked on the exemplary standards set by the children's hospital and urged them to prioritize the hospital's welfare, likening it to their own homes



LAHORE : Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi is inaugurating the upgraded DAPD Block of Children's Hospital from Abdul Mufti Hanan and Donor Sher Baz to children suffering from blood cancer.—DNA

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : In a remarkable feat of efficiency, a

12-month-long project was completed within a matter of weeks as the children's hospital witnessed an

upgrade of its emergency block. Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi had the blood cancer patient

children namely Kaina'at, Abdul Mufti Hanaan and donor Sher Baz inaugurate the upgraded OPD block. The CM inspected different floors and interacted with doctors and faculty members who expressed gratitude for the hospital's upgrade, praising the CM for his efforts. Impressed by the transformation, CM Naqvi remarked on the exemplary standards set by the children's hospital and urged them to prioritize the hospital's welfare, likening it to their own homes. He emphasized the importance of ownership among doctors, nurses and paramedics to ensure the hospital's continued excellence. CM observed the hospital information management system at the reception counter. The OPD pharmacy, patient admissions and discharges

and the medical store were integrated into the system for efficient management. The CM noted that the upgraded OPD block matched state-of-the-art facilities. The health and C&W departments have worked tirelessly to complete the challenging task promptly; he said and directed to provide additional benches in the waiting area to ensure comfortable seating for the attendants. Provincial Minister Dr Javed Akram, health secretary, secretary C&W, commissioner Lahore and others were also present. Earlier on, CM sets 10 days deadline for the new lab and diagnostic centre of services hospital. Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi visited the Services Hospital late at night to monitor the construction of a new lab and diagnostic center at its front.

HEC organises debating competition

DNA

LAHORE : The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) on Friday organised regional round of Pakistan Universities Debating Competition at Khorana Auditorium of Punjab University Institute of Chemistry. On this occasion, Punjab University Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Khalid Mahmood, HEC's Regional Director Ghafoor Ahmed, Director PU Directorate of Students Affairs Dr Muhammad Ali Klasra, faculty members and a large number of students were present. University of Sargodha won first position in Urdu declamation contest while University of Child Health Sciences bagged second position. Punjab University won the third position in the Urdu declamation competitions. In English debates, King Edward Medical College Lahore won the first position, Pakistan Institute of Fashion Design second and Government College University Lahore won the third position. Students from 48 universities participated in the competitions. In his address, PU VC Prof Dr Khalid Mahmood paid tribute to the HEC for organizing successful competitions. He said that such activities improve the hidden abilities of students. He said that PU will continue to play its role to increase the skills of students with education.

Police introduces "ICT-15" app for IOS users

ISLAMABAD : Islamabad Capital Police on Friday introduced an "ICT-15" application for IOS users; to ensure the safety of citizens. According to a police spokesman, following the special directions of the Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP), Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police ICT-15 mobile application has been introduced for IOS users, to ensure the safety of citizens. He said that the purpose of this mobile app was to enable citizens to inform the police without any hassle or time delay and ensure immediate police assistance. Through this mobile app, citizens could promptly notify the police of any incidents or emergencies by sending audio messages or images. Moreover, to utilize this service the citizens should first download the "ICT 15" mobile application from the App Store, he added.—APP

MWAP holds seminar at SCCI

SIALKOT : The Medical Women's Association Pakistan (MWAP) organised a seminar "Empowering Mothers for Future Generations" at the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) here on Friday. The seminar was attended by Vice President SCCI Amer Majeed Sheikh, Principal Khawaja Muhammad Saffar Medical College Sialkot Haroon Hameed, President Women Medical Association of Pakistan Dr Wajaha Rizwan, Senior Vice President Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sialkot (WCCIS) Gulzeb Waqas Awan and a large number of students, including social workers, participated. On this occasion, Amer Majeed Sheikh said that the purpose of the seminar was to empower mothers to make the future of the new generation bright, successful and independent in the society. He added that the role of mother in the formation of a healthy society is a fact which no society can deny. Speaking during the seminar, MWAP President Dr Wajaha Rizwan said that this platform supported every initiative of women empowerment and: "We are here for every woman who has desire and courage to lead". "Let's all encourage each other together", she added.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

FEBRUARY

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

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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 Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

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



Departments

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Bulgaria to Pakistan hosted female heads of various missions in Islamabad. Seen in the picture are Ambassador of Italy, Ambassador of Philippines, High Commissioners of Canada and Kenya, Ambassador of European Union, Charge d Affaires of India and High Commissioner of United Kingdom. —DNA

Ambassador assures coop for making ICCI BOC successful

The Ambassador said that Pakistan and UAE have great potential to strengthen business relations and set up joint ventures. He stressed that a series of BOC-like events should be organized by the Pakistani Chambers of Commerce in UAE to explore all untapped areas of bilateral cooperation and expand economic relations

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: H.E. Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, Pakistan Ambassador to UAE lauded ICCI for organizing the next edition of its Business Opportunities Conference (BOC) in Dubai in the first week of March 2024 and assured his cooperation in making it successful. He said this while talking to Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry who met him in Dubai and discussed with him the matters for making ICCI BOC in Dubai a result-oriented event.

The Ambassador said that Pakistan and

UAE have great potential to strengthen business relations and set up joint ventures. He stressed that a series of BOC-like events should be organized by the Pakistani Chambers of Commerce in UAE to explore all untapped areas of bilateral cooperation and expand economic relations. He said that his Embassy would extend all possible cooperation to ICCI in making the BOC a landmark event. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce said that ICCI has already held successful BOCs in Turkey, Malaysia, and Azerbaijan and the Chamber has planned to organize the next edition of BOC in Dubai, which

is a hub of business and investment activities. He said that a 160-member delegation of ICCI representing real estate, construction, IT, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, food processing and packaging, light engineering, logistics, franchising, tourism, and other sectors would attend the BOC and Award Ceremony. He said that both countries have great potential to further enhance bilateral trade and economic relations. He hoped that ICCI BOC would provide a good platform for the private sectors of both countries to hold B2B meetings, exchange ideas, develop strong business linkages, and explore opportunities for business and in-

vestment collaborations in areas of interest. He said that ICCI would also organize a small exhibition of Pakistani products on the sidelines of BOC to show their export potential. He said that representatives of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and other prominent businessmen and investors of the UAE would be invited to the BOC. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari also met with Ambassador Javed Malik, President, Dubai Diplomat Business Club, and took him on board to make the ICC BOC in Dubai a successful event for Pakistan. Javed Malik appreciated ICCI for organizing its BOC in Dubai and assured his cooperation to make it successful.

Economy was destroyed by the bad decisions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Friday that the wrong decisions of economic managers have never allowed financial stability in the country. He said that merit has always been ignored for the benefit of a small group, and the direction of the economy was deliberately kept wrong, which bankrupted the country. Mian Zahid Hussain said that Pakistan is currently surviving because

of IMF loans and support from some countries that are fed up with providing continued help. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that the new government should hand over the economy to serious people instead of illusionists to improve matters. The business leader said that Pakistan's economy can no longer bear the burden of power theft, line losses, and capacity charges. The only options for running the country are immediately selling failed government agencies, expanding the tax base, and observing merit. Mian Zahid Hussain said the economic steps taken for the short-lived benefits resulted in applause and headlines. Still, they also shake the

foundations of the economy, which the masses must brave. He said the incoming government should choose serious people to manage the economy instead of magicians seeking cheap popularity. Failed politicians consider it necessary to cheat the masses. Sometimes, the public is told that people from the United States and other rich nations will come here for jobs, and occasionally, such benefits are doled out, which many rich countries cannot afford. We don't need rulers tackling circular debt and other problems through borrowing. Instead of ensuring economic development, some rulers try to increase GDP to cheat the public by increasing imports. A former prime minister set a record

of \$72 billion in imports to boost GDP, shaking the country's foundations but managing to fool the people. He questioned how someone could reduce the dollar's value and increase the value of the local currency without increasing exports when the economy is on the verge. A performer recently jumped into the economic arena, damaged the economy by his policies, and ruined a deal with the IMG before leaving the country. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that the new government should avoid such people, avoid quick actions to give an impression of development, and ensure merit in decision-making; otherwise, it will pay a cost in the shape of failure.

Kyrgyz embassy holds photo exhibition



DNA

ISLAMABAD: A solemn event dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was held at the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Islamabad. During the event, a photo exhibition was organized for the participants about the history of the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autono-

mous Region, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan. Participants were shown video clips and materials demonstrating beautiful places and elements of Kyrgyzstan's culture, tourism and investment opportunities. The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan H.E. Mr. Ulanbek Totuaev in his speech provided de-

tailed information on the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast and bilateral relations between two countries. The Ambassador informed that today Kyrgyzstan is aimed at strengthening interaction with the countries of the region. Noting the importance of promoting cooperation with Pakistan, he proposed focusing on the development of cultural-humanitarian cooperation as the most promising connecting element between the two friendly countries.

ANF recovers 108 kg drugs in five operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations across the country managed to recover 108 kg of drugs and arrested six accused including a woman, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that in an operation, 920 intoxicated tablets were recovered from the possession of the Muscat-bound passengers including a woman, arrested at Multan Airport. 34 grams of weed was recovered from a parcel sent from UK at courier office in Rawalpindi while 101 kg hashish was recovered near Rughni Road Chaman. In fourth operation, 5 kg weed was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near Karachi Railway Station. 1 kg opium and 590 grams heroin were recovered from the possession of three suspects arrested from Model Town, Bahawalpur. Separate cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.—APP

Umrah facilities spotlighted by Nusuk.com in Dubai exhibition

ISLAMABAD: Umrah performers, including those from the UAE and expatriates, discovered at an exhibition facility provided for them in Saudi Arabia through the digital platform Nusuk.com, developed by the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah and the Saudi Tourism Authority. Continuing until February 17, the ongoing exhibition at Dubai's Festival City Mall attracted over 400 partners from the travel industry, along with Hajj and Umrah agencies. Its goal is to acquaint visitors and tourists from diverse nationalities with Virtual Reality (VR) technology, said a message received here. Additionally, as part of the exhibition, a pavilion has been established in the UAE market by one of Nusuk's authorized companies, offering Umrah packages to fortunate individuals eager to embark on the pilgrimage. The Nusuk app and website offer many packages, with more than 200 partners worldwide. Pilgrims can easily book everything they need for their trip, like hotels, transportation, and visas, using Nusuk. Also, Umrah companies offer their services through the app. Representatives from various Umrah and travel service companies in the UAE responded positively to the exhibition, expressing that it would bolster the strategic partnership between them and their Saudi counterparts.—DNA

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HEC, NCHR sign MoU for Joint academic and research activities

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan signed on Thursday a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) to jointly work under a collaborative arrangement on various academic and research activities in the Human Rights area in Pakistan. Under the MoU, HEC and NCHR aim to equip academia, researchers, and students with knowledge of human rights laws and instruments, promote literacy through various media channels, introduce courses focusing on marginalized groups, and establish human rights study centers. Additionally, the partnership seeks to conduct academic research contributing to a culture that values human rights and create and distribute digital content for widespread awareness. The MoU was signed by the Executive Director HEC, Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum and Secretary NCHR, Malik Kamran Azam Khan Rajar. The ceremony was attended by Dr. Bushra Mirza, (Member-Research and Innovation) HEC, Ms. Noor Anna Malik (Managing Director-NAHE), Engr. Muhammad Raza Chohan (Adviser-Academics), and other officials from HEC and NCHR. Speaking at the occasion, Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum emphasized HEC's commitment towards fostering awareness and research at higher education institutions, highlighting the importance of investing in teachers to enhance their capacities in igniting social responsibility among the students.

Briefs

Police arrest 12 for possessing illegal weapons

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi district police on the directives of Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi conducted raids in different areas and netted 12 accused for possessing weapons, ammunition and other items. According to a police spokesman, Bani, Taxila, Saddar Wah, Gujjar Khan, Saddar Baroni, and Rawat police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and rounded up 12 accused namely Arslan, Adnan, Tasawar, Umair, Akhtar and others and recovered 11 pistols 30 bore, ammunition and other items from their possession. The SSP said that strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the lawbreakers and operations against aerial firing and illegal weapon holders would continue. SSP Operations holds —APP

'Khuli Kutcheri' to address grievances of citizens

RAWALPINDI: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations, Rawalpindi Hafiz Kamran Asghar on the directives of the City Police Officer, Rawalpindi held a 'Khuli Kutcheri' here on Friday in Police Lines Headquarters to address the grievances of the people. The SSP issued orders to the officers concerned to complete inquiries and send reports within the given time frame. He said all-out efforts were being made to ensure the dispensation of speedy justice purely on merit to the people and to improve service delivery standards. According to a Police spokesman, Police Officers under Punjab's open door policy were holding 'Khuli Kutcheries' to provide relief to the citizens. He informed that the SSP issued directives to the officers concerned to take action and submit a report on the complaint submitted by the citizens in 'Khuli Kutcheri'.

Six drug peddlers, bootleggers netted

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers and bootleggers here on Friday arrested six accused besides recovering over 1940 grams charras, 30 liters liquor and other items from their possession. A police spokesperson said that Rataamral, Rawat, Sadiqabad and Bani police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and rounded up Hamza, Muhammad Nabi, Shakeel, Munir, Yousaf, and Kashif and recovered 1940 grams charras and 30 liters liquor from their possession. Separate cases have been registered against all accused while further investigations are underway. City Police Officer, Rawalpindi had directed the police officers to accelerate ongoing operations against drug peddlers, bootleggers and other lawbreakers, he added.—APP

Indigenization, tech sovereignty key to Pak defence evolution

The presentations were followed by active participation from a diverse audience, including retired military officers, scholars, journalists, and students, who engaged in an interactive Question and Answer session, further enriching the discourse on this critical subject

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad, successfully hosted a seminar titled 'Shifting Battlefields: Impact of Emerging Technologies on the Character of Warfare in South Asia'. This event convened distinguished experts from the defence, technology, and academic sectors to discuss the transformative role of emerging technologies in modern warfare, with a particular focus on South Asia. Air Marshal Farooq Habib (Retd), Senior Director at CASS, opened the seminar by stressing the complexity and unpredictability of technological evolution in military contexts. He emphasised the necessity for Pakistan's defence sector to adapt and evolve in response to these advancements to maintain strategic and tactical superiority. Lieutenant General Aamer Riaz (Retd), former President of the National Defense University, in his Keynote Address, underscored the pro-

found influence of technological advancements on the character of warfare. He predicted a technological upheaval, highlighting the need for strategic adaptation to innovations in space, cyber, AI, and more. General Riaz called for a revision of traditional warfare strategies to include emerging technologies that are redefining conflict dynamics. Mr Fawad Zahir, a Defence and Strategic Studies Expert, focused on the importance of airpower, enhanced by big data analysis, quantum computing, and Machine Learning. He urged for robust civilian-military collaboration to harness technological advancements for defence purposes. Mr Zahir also strongly advocated strategic investment in technologies that align with Pakistan's core defence needs, given the country's budgetary constraints. Prof. Dr Yasir Ayaz, Chairman/CPD of the National Centre of Artificial Intelligence (NCAI), highlighted AI's potential to revolutionise warfare, marking it the third major evolution after gunpowder and nuclear power. He stressed the importance of



indigenous development of AI technologies to ensure strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty, highlighting the need for a balance between innovation and regulatory oversight. Mr Khawaja Mohammad Ali, a Cyber Security, Data Privacy, and Digital Forensics Expert, delineated the critical role of cyber operations in modern

conflict, advocating for the establishment of a national cybersecurity authority; extensive training and awareness programmes; cyber diplomacy; and indigenous development in cybersecurity solutions. Senior Journalist and Columnist, Mr Zazar Khurro, focused on the strategic importance of narrative building in the

context of advanced technological warfare. He discussed the long-term process of narrative construction facilitated by technology, pointing to the need for authenticity and the significant impact of social media on public opinion. President CASS-Islamabad, Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), in his Concluding

Remarks, reiterated the critical importance of first-shot capability in modern warfare, driven by advancements in sensors and detection technologies. He called for an indigenisation strategy that supports the development of homegrown technologies, ensuring that Pakistan's defence sector remains competitive and innovative. The seminar underscored the urgent need for Pakistan to embrace indigenisation and support homegrown technologies for enhanced national security and defence autonomy. As emerging technologies continue to reshape the landscape of modern warfare, strategic, policy-oriented approaches are essential for Pakistan to deal with the challenges and opportunities presented by this new era of conflict. The presentations were followed by active participation from a diverse audience, including retired military officers, scholars, journalists, and students, who engaged in an interactive Question and Answer session, further enriching the discourse on this critical subject.

President directs Rs3.46 mln payment to heirs of two policyholders

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has directed two private insurance companies to pay the death insurance claims of Rs 3 million and Rs 4,60,000 to the legal heirs of the deceased policyholders. He issued these directions while deciding two separate representations, filed by Adamjee Life Assurance Company Limited and EFU Life Assurance Limited against the decisions of Wafaqi Mohtasib, asking them to pay the death insurance claims to the respective claimants, a President Secretariat press release said. As per details, Zahid Nasreen's deceased sister had obtained an insur-

ance policy from Adamjee Life Assurance Company for the sum assured of Rs 3 million against an annual premium of Rs300,000 in 2021. After her sister died in 2022, the company refused to pay the death insurance claim on the pretext that the deceased had hidden her pre-insurance ailment of acute kidney injury and chronic liver disease at the time of obtaining the insurance policy. Similarly, Memoona Naeem's husband obtained an insurance policy from EFU Life Assurance Limited for the sum assured of Rs 460,000 against an annual premium of Rs 23,000 in 2015. Her husband died the same year and when she filed the death insurance claim, it was repudiated on the ground that the deceased

had not disclosed his pre-insurance ailment of hypertension at the time of obtaining the policy. Feeling aggrieved, the complainants separately approached the Wafaqi Mohtasib to seek relief, which passed the orders in their favour and directed the respective insurance companies to honour their claims. Later, the companies filed separate representations with the President against the decisions of the Mohtasib. The President after perusing the material facts of the case and hearing the parties, rejected both the representations. He held that the companies had failed to produce any evidence establishing the pre-insurance ailments. He said the onus to prove the pre-insurance ail-

ments rested upon the companies and the repudiation of death insurance claims required unpeachable evidence to prove the ailments and their knowledge on the part of the policyholders. He also referred to Lahore High Court's decision wherein it had been held that concealment of ailments, such as diabetes and hypertension, could not be termed as done fraudulently as most people having such ailments, by remaining more careful in their lifetime, lived either for decades or longer than people not having such diseases. Keeping in view the facts, President Alvi upheld the orders of the Mohtasib, directing both the companies to pay the death insurance.

Caretaker setup initiated major steps

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Friday said that the caretaker government had resolved major long-standing issues in a short span to steer the country towards economic stability. He said the caretaker setup also provided all possible facilities on priority to the international investors and business community to attract maximum foreign direct investment in the country. He emphasized that the caretaker government was committed to continue its efforts to resolve the problems facing the country's economy till its last day of working. Chairing a meeting to review various issues of Karachi Electric (KE), the prime minister said that the government was striving to solve the remaining problems as soon as possible to remove all obstacles in the way of uninterrupted supply of electricity to the residents of Karachi. The prime minister directed to find out solutions on priority to issues faced by the Karachi-Electric. The Karachi-Electric delegation thanked the prime minister and his team for resolving its long-standing issues. The prime minister also hailed the signing of the interconnection agreement between National Transmission and Distribution Company (NTDC) and Karachi Electric (K.E) held the other day. The CEO of Karachi-Electric paid tribute to the caretaker PM and the government officials for solving the problems faced by the company on the priority basis. The prime minister directed that NEPRA and Karachi Electric should jointly find a solution to these problems and submit a report in this regard as soon as possible. Caretaker Minister for Energy Muhammad Ali, Chief Executive Officer of K.E and concerned high officials participated in the meeting.—DNA

Prices of essential kitchen items fall by 0.78 pc

The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs. 17,732, decreased by 0.78 percent and went down to 307.99 points from last week's 310.42 points

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The prices of essential kitchen items eased as the weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed a decrease of 0.78 per cent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on February 15, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 315.18 points as compared to 317.65 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 34.25 per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all

expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs. 17,732, decreased by 0.78 percent and went down to 307.99 points from last week's 310.42 points. The SPI for consumption groups from Rs. 17,732-22,888, Rs. 22,889-29,517; Rs. 29,518-44,175 and above Rs. 44,175, decreased by 0.82 percent, 0.72 percent, 0.77 and 0.77 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 22 (43.14%) items increased, 11 (21.57%) items decreased and 18 (35.29%) items remained stable. The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included eggs (28.82%), chicken (4.23%), onions (3.48%), LPG (2.85%), gur (1.13%), wheat flour (0.32%), tomatoes (0.29%), pulse masoor (0.28%) and mustard oil (0.18%). The items that recorded an increase in their average prices on a week-on-

week basis included bananas (4.64%), potatoes (2.80%), match box (1.31%), long cloth (1.29%), cooked daal (0.77%), shirting (0.63%), energy saver (0.62%), pulse moong & rice basmati (0.56%) each, mutton (0.48%), cooked beef (0.39%) and pulse mash (0.35%). The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on year-on-year basis included gas charges for q1 (1108.59%), tomatoes (134.09%), chilies powder (81.74%), cigarettes (77.13%), wheat flour (66.12%), gents sponge chappal (58.05%), sugar (54.59%), gents sandal (53.37%), gur (49.38%), salt powdered (39.97%) tea packet (33.22%), garlic (32.06%), while decrease is observed in the prices of bananas (18.29%), mustard oil (15.67%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (15.34%), cooking oil 5 litre (10.35%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (9.56%), LPG (8.50%) and diesel (0.33%).

Pakistan-Turkiye high level military dialogue group

RAWALPINDI: The 18th round of Pakistan-Turkiye High Level Military Dialogue

ant General (R) Hamood uz Zaman Khan while Turkish delegation was headed by

had a meeting with Secretary Defence, Lieutenant General (R) Hamood uz Zaman Khan,

discussion. Both leaders expressed satisfaction on the pace of defence cooperation and pledged to take it to new heights. The issues like security, counter-terrorism and prevailing regional as well as geopolitical environment also came under discussion. In addition, the delegation took stock of the progress made so far since holding of HLMDDG meeting in Turkiye last year. Matters relating to defence cooperation covering training exercises, exchange of visits and co-production of defence equipment were discussed. The deliberations were held in a most cordial and congenial environment. Delegation leaders resolved to work together for enhanced cooperation in the defence and security fields.—DNA



Group (HLMDDG) meeting was successfully held here in Ministry of Defence from February 13-16 where Pakistan's delegation was led by Secretary Defence, Lieuten-

Deputy Chief of Turkish General Staff, General Irfan Ozsert. Prior to holding of Plenary Session, Deputy Chief of Turkish General Staff, General Irfan Ozsert

a news release said. During the HLMDDG meeting, matters of mutual interest including the whole spectrum of bilateral defence cooperation came under

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UK recession: no growth and no ideas either

WE'RE on the up!" claimed about the British economy. Sorry, loyal Conservative cheerleaders, but exactly the reverse is true. Instead of being on the up, we're on the slide. On Thursday, the Office for National Statistics announced that the UK is in fact in recession, with a 0.3% drop in gross domestic product for the last quarter of 2023 to follow a 0.1% drop in the third quarter. The economy is therefore getting smaller. This is a recession. It is a huge national blow, both economically and politically. It is true that the slide into recession has been a gentle one. Few economists believe that the announcement portends a downward lurch to compare with the recession of 1980 or the one after the financial crisis in 2009, when GDP fell by more than 4%. Do not, though, be misled by talk of a "technical" recession. An economy is either growing or it is not. Ours is not growing. It is shrinking. It is also true that an economy slipping into recession is not a uniquely British problem. This week, Japan did the same, allowing Germany to replace it as the world's third largest economy (after the US and China). Germany itself hovers on the threshold, while few European economies can expect anything much better than stagnant growth in 2024. Britain, though, faces higher interest rates and higher inflation than Germany and the eurozone, while its poor long-term records on investment and wage growth leave the country particularly ill-equipped to recover quickly. In any case, a shallow recession does not soften the serious blow for households. Here, GDP per head is down for the seventh successive quarter, not the second. The Resolution Foundation calculates that this is equivalent to a nearly £1,500 real-terms loss per household since the cost of living crisis accelerated after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The same loss per household since 2009 now amounts to around £23,000. With interest rates and inflation still high, the pinch is set to get tighter still. All this would be serious enough merely for its effects on the national economy and on individual living standards. But it will also shape the political battleground in election year. At the start of 2023, Rishi Sunak promised, in one of his five pledges, that his government would "grow the economy, creating better-paid jobs and opportunity right across the country". A year later, he has not grown the economy. He has put it into reverse. It is hardly surprising that a newly published Ipsos survey finds that more than two-thirds of British people say the country is in decline – well above the average for the 28 nations covered in the research. The tragedy is not merely that Mr Sunak has overseen this descent into recession. It is also that he lacks any clue about how to extricate Britain from it. Before the GDP figures were published on Thursday, the Treasury was already briefing that Jeremy Hunt is considering slashing public spending to fund pre-election tax cuts next month. Perhaps this was merely pre-election and pre-Budget expectation management. But it embodies precisely what is wrong about this government. It forgets nothing and learns nothing. It sacrifices the national good for a political fetish that will leave public services even weaker than they are already. No wonder the public think that the country is in decline.



The view on Europe's rural revolt

ANOTHER day, another tractor blockade. Earlier this week, all economic activity at the Belgian port of Antwerp ground to a halt as hundreds of farmers prevented access to freight. In Spain, tractors blocked motorways near Seville and Granada, and in Catalonia. As a rolling wave of rural discontent has made itself felt across Europe since the start of the year, only four EU member states have remained unaffected. Numerically, farmers account for only 4% of Europe's working population. But as Europe's political leaders are belatedly coming to realise, the burgeoning crisis has outside implications. A perfect storm of factors – including rising energy costs, competition from lightly regulated foreign imports and supermarket profit-gouging – have driven angry farmers off the land and on to the streets of capitals. But in disputes that touch on some of the faultlines of contemporary culture wars, there is a growing danger that the EU's green deal takes the rap for a crisis incubated elsewhere. Ahead of European elections in which they aspire to make major gains, radical right parties such as AfD in Germany and Marine Le Pen's National Rally are using opposition to environmental reforms as a recruiting agent and campaign theme. In Brussels, and in national capitals, a degree of green backtracking is already under way. As the momentum of the farmers' protests grows, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, last week shelved plans to reduce the use of pesticides and softened targets on cutting non-CO2 emissions. Announcing those concessions, Ms Von der Leyen was right to say that in the context of the multiple challenges they face, farmers "deserve to be listened to". Too often in the recent past that has not been the case. In the Netherlands, a politically tin-eared plan to reduce nitrogen emissions by summarily closing thousands of farms led to a rebellion that helped topple the government. It also, indirectly, gave an opening to the nationalist demagogue, Geert Wilders, who surfed the anti-elite, insurgent mood to win the subsequent election. But damaging tactical retreats on green issues are hardly the way forward. Instead, a persuasive strategic vision of the future of European agriculture is urgently required – one with sustainable farming as its centrepiece, but which also tackles the injustices that have fuelled discontent. As most farmers recognise, environmental adaptation is a necessity in a landscape increasingly to be shaped by drought, floods and heatwaves. However, the common agricultural policy, which funnels subsidies to large-scale industrial farms and away from struggling small and medium-sized producers, also needs to be reformed. Similarly, the pursuit of free-trade ambitions – such as those driving current talks between the EU and Latin America – should not be allowed to expose Europe's farmers to competition with producers who are not subject to the same environmental regulations. And more generous resources should be deployed, at state or EU level, to help beleaguered farms cope with the triple whammy of rising costs, squeezed margins and the green transition.

Election-2024 fiasco – fixing responsibility

Qamar Bashir



The 2024 elections in Pakistan have drawn widespread criticism for allegedly compromising the integrity of the voting process, leading regional and international media to describe the event as exceptionally unfair, non-transparent, and heavily rigged in the nation's history. Both the United States and the United Kingdom have voiced significant concerns over the electoral proceedings, advocating for thorough investigations into the numerous reported...

THE government and Election Commission attributed the slowdown and collapse of the internet during the 2024 elections to the Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) raises questions, given PTA's declared objectives. These objectives emphasize the regulation of telecommunication systems and services, promoting user interests, ensuring a wide range of high-quality and competitive services, and modernizing telecommunications throughout Pakistan. Additionally, PTA is tasked with investigating complaints against licensees and taking action on alleged contraventions of its provisions and rules. The situation suggests discrepancy between PTA's mission and reported internet disruptions during a critical of national elections. If the slowdown was indeed under PTA's control, it would be at odds with its mandate to promote and protect telecommunication service quality and accessibility for all users in Pakistan, including during significant events like elections which rely heavily on transparent and open communication channels. This scenario underscores the need for a thorough investigation to determine whether the disruptions were due to technical failures within PTA's oversight or deliberate actions that contravened its objectives. PTA perhaps has to give a lot more explanations for internet slowdown which has jeopardized the entire election exercise costing billions to the government exchequer and for keeping the entire nation at razor's edge. These are not the political parties which are blaming the government for deliberate slow down; this allegation is also supported by independent watchdogs like NetBlocks which have termed the disruption and slowdown of the internet during the Elections-2024 campaign events deliberate rather than due to genuine technical issues. NetBlocks described the incidents as "nation-scale disruption to social media platforms," which were consistent with previous events imposed during opposition rallies or speeches by opposition leaders and the immediate restoration of services following these events, have led to widespread skepticism about the official explanations. The independent observers have argued that these disruptions were politically motivated, aimed at silencing opposition voices and controlling the flow of information during the election period, rather than being the result of genuine technical problems. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan condemned the suspension of internet services as a breach of international law and fundamental rights, emphasizing the importance of freedom of expression, especially in the context of elections lending credence to the argument that the internet disruptions were seen as more than just technical glitches. The election process, which was closely watched by the en-

tire nation and had profound implications for the country's future, was reportedly marred by these disruptions. This situation was particularly critical because the integrity and smooth conduct of the elections depended heavily on stable communication channels, especially in the digital age where much of the electoral communication and reporting relies on internet access. The absence of public accountability or scrutiny of PTA by contesting parties, civil society, and government bodies is surprising, especially considering the verified reports of inefficiency and unpreparedness. Such a lapse in responsibility, especially when the stakes involved the democratic process and the future governance of the country, raises questions about the regulatory oversight and crisis management capabilities of the authority. The 2024 elections in Pakistan have drawn widespread criticism for allegedly compromising the integrity of the voting process, leading regional and international media to describe the event as exceptionally unfair, non-transparent, and heavily rigged in the nation's history. Both the United States and the United Kingdom have voiced significant concerns over the electoral proceedings, advocating for thorough investigations into the numerous reported irregularities. The US Department of State specifically called attention to infringements on the freedoms of expression and assembly, underscoring the fundamental democratic principles at risk. Similarly, the UK Foreign Secretary raised issues regarding internet accessibility and anomalies in the reporting of election results, indicating potential barriers to a free and fair electoral process. Moreover, the European Union expressed dismay over the compromised level playing field, highlighting constraints on political engagement and accusations of electoral meddling. These international reactions underscore a collective call for transparency and accountability in addressing the alleged shortcomings of the electoral exercise in Pakistan. Given the significant impact of internet disruptions during the 2024 elections in Pakistan, it is imperative for PTI, alongside other affected political parties and civil society activists, to advocate for the appointment of an independent panel. This panel should comprise both internationally and nationally renowned Information Technology experts tasked with conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the internet backbone's technical capacity to handle the entire election process's demands. A key point of inquiry should be whether the existing internet infrastructure was adequately equipped to support the volume of election-related communications. If limitations were known, the pertinent question arises as to why such critical information was not communicated to the Election Commission, the media, and the public at large. The investigation should delve into

whether there were any efforts to augment capacity in anticipation of the increased load and scrutinize the extent of consultation between the Election Commission and PTA regarding the online election system's readiness. In cases where assurances were provided to the Election Commission about the sufficiency of internet services for election communications, yet failures occurred, the investigation must explore the causes of these discrepancies. Conversely, if no consultations took place, both PTA and the Election Commission may bear responsibility for the oversight. This inquiry should also aim to pinpoint the specific individuals or groups within PTA and related bodies accountable for maintaining the integrity of internet services and identify any lapses in their duties that contributed to the nationwide anxiety experienced during the elections. Such a thorough and transparent investigation is essential for restoring public confidence in Pakistan's electoral infrastructure and ensuring the robustness of its digital communications for future electoral exercises. Based upon the report of the independent investigators, PTI should pursue all constitutional and legal fora to seek justice. The technical evaluation of internet services capability and sustainability will clear the fog on the entire process and will bring forward the actual culprit. The Election 2024 debacle in Pakistan, marked by allegations of internet disruptions and electoral malpractices, necessitates an unwavering commitment to transparency and accountability. The dissonance between the Pakistan Telecom Authority's (PTA) stated goals and the observed internet challenges during such a pivotal event underscores the urgency for a meticulous investigation. The involvement of independent IT experts, alongside scrutiny from entities like NetBlocks and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, is crucial in dissecting the root causes—be they technical oversights or deliberate obstructions. International concern from the US, UK, and EU amplifies the call for clarity, stressing the global implications of Pakistan's electoral integrity. For PTI and civil society, the path forward involves leveraging legal avenues and constitutional mechanisms, informed by a comprehensive technical audit of the telecommunications infrastructure. This proactive approach, grounded in the findings of a thorough inquiry, is essential not only for redressing the immediate grievances but also for fortifying Pakistan's democratic framework against future vulnerabilities.

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

Whither the European anti-war movements?

Dieter Reinisch

The crisis in the small peace movement is exacerbated by its division: A first peace conference took place in Vienna, Austria, in June 2023. While the participants in Rome were not among the organizers of the Vienna conference, the June organizers did not appear in Rome in October. The conference call and the final declaration of the Vienna conference would solely blame Russia and do not mention NATO's responsibility, Langthaler says, explaining division among the movement. One of the Vienna organizers was Leo Gabriel. He has been on the International Council of World Social Forums for decades. The organizers of the Rome conference would have "an eye on a political victory for the progressive...

WAR has been going on across Ukraine for two years, in the East of the country for even ten years. "Israel" is reducing large parts of the Gaza Strip to rubble, storming hospitals, and occupying schools in their ongoing genocide. In the past, tens of thousands marched in Europe against imperialist aggressions. However, this time, no peace movement has developed in Austria and Germany – a search for clues with those who want to change that. At the end of October, a few hundred activists from around the world met in Rome, Italy. What they have in common: They want an end to the war in Ukraine because, according to the title of the conference, it has the potential to escalate into a Third World War. In the final declaration of the conference "Stop World War 3: International Initiative for Peace," delegates from 40 organizations and individuals from 25 countries called for "NATO defeat in Ukraine." The aggressive policy of the West brought about the war that "did not begin on February 24th, 2022," for it began "much earlier, with the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe. The dirty wars in Yugoslavia, the collapse of the once most vigorous Balkan state, and the provocation of wars in the Caucasus were all stages of the same project. The war against Russia had already begun immediately after the illegal dissolution of the USSR, which was enforced against the will of its citizens," the Rome declaration reads. To ensure that this situation does not lead to an even larger conflagration, it was decided to "form a permanent coordination network." A follow-up conference is scheduled to take place at the end of 2024. International media had little interest in the meeting in Rome, although even Slovakia's former head of government, Ján Čarnogurský, stopped by, RT and Press TV were the only ones who attended and reported the event. For Wilhelm Langthaler, it was still a success. He tells Al Mayadeen English over coffee in Austria's capital, Vienna, "We tried to get out of the left-wing bubble, and we partially succeeded." Langthaler has been active in the anti-war movement for decades and has organized many similar conferences. He comments that the peace movement is in a "deplorable state". Millions demonstrated against NATO in the 1980s and the Iraq invasion in 2003, Langthaler remembers. He recognizes three main reasons for the decline of the peace movement: First, the integration of the political left in Europe into the "Western, globalist regime," as he calls the transatlantic axis led by the US. Secondly, the "US empire is in decline," and there is a tendency toward world war. The left "subordinated itself to the Western narrative" in this historical situation, he explains to me. Thirdly, there was a "left-wing liberalization of the Western regime." In the resulting culture war, the Western left would have assimilated itself culturally to neoliberalism. The crisis in the small peace movement is exacerbated by its

division: A first peace conference took place in Vienna, Austria, in June 2023. While the participants in Rome were not among the organizers of the Vienna conference, the June organizers did not appear in Rome in October: The conference call and the final declaration of the Vienna conference would solely blame Russia and do not mention NATO's responsibility, Langthaler says, explaining division among the movement. One of the Vienna organizers was Leo Gabriel. He has been on the International Council of World Social Forums for decades. The organizers of the Rome conference would have "an eye on a political victory for the progressive forces" and would "take sides". His approach is different: "Peace involves a different logic. It means creating a platform on which negotiations can take place." The left would often rely on the victory of one side and thereby ignore the prospect of peace, he tells me, a few days after I meet with Langthaler. Nevertheless, he contradicts my claim that the peace movement is in crisis: "It is getting stronger and stronger," says Gabriel. It would grow strong, particularly in the Global South, and a lot has also happened in the North since the war against Gaza. The largest peace demonstrations since 2003 occurred in London. "Austria is a lame country regarding movements." Germany is different because the Peace Bureau in Berlin organized the Vienna conference. Additionally, in February and November 2023, significant peace demonstrations with tens of thousands of participants took place under the patronage of Sahra Wagenknecht and Alice Schwarzer. Sevim Dagdelen was involved in the organization of the peace demonstrations in Berlin, the capital of Germany. "There is a great deal of rejection among the population to the (German) federal government's current escalation course," says the Bundestag (Parliament) member from North Rhine-Westphalia in an interview for Al Mayadeen. She is pleased that 900,000 people have signed the "Manifesto for Peace" by Wagenknecht and Schwarzer. The manifesto calls for a stop to arms shipments to Ukraine, for an immediate ceasefire, and a negotiated solution to the conflict. However, many leftist activists did not participate in the rally. "The failure of the party Die Linke (The Left) leadership on the peace issue is inexcusable." The chairperson of the party and the Berlin state chairwoman, Katina Schubert, join in with the warmongers of the Greens and the Liberal FDP with their demands for arms shipments or (the Thuringian Prime Minister) Bodo Ramelow, who supports arms shipments (to Ukraine) against Russia, to any extent necessary. "Such stances are a heavy burden for cooperation with the peace movement," explains Dagdelen. The party Die Linke has "arrived in the NATO camp," she emphasizes. That was one reason why Dagdelen split from Die Linke party in October and set up a new party with Wagenknecht under the name Buendniss Sahra Wagenk-

necht (BSW) in January 2024. "The Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance, BSW, advocates for a ceasefire and negotiated solution to the Ukraine war and the conflict in Palestine," she says, adding, "Arms shipments are not a solution, but part of the problem." Franz Soelkner also wants support from politicians. He is a Styrian Peace Platform member and has organized several Graz demonstrations since October 7. On November 4, 1,500 participants came, an impressive number for the Styrian capital. However, as is often the case, "no one from the Communist Party, KPÖ, which governs the city, her party, then so much would be possible," he says over the phone. Yet, the KPÖ, a recognized force in past antiwar and peace movements in Central Europe, stays out of the mobilizations this time. Long-time activist Karl Reitter also had to experience this. When he wrote an article about the peace movement and the Ukrainian war, it was rejected by the party magazine Volksstimme, in whose editorial team Reitter was. He gave a copy of the text to Al Mayadeen. "I argued that something like the demonstration in Berlin in February 2023 should also be organized in Austria," says Reitter when I met him in his Viennese apartment. It should not be about who you demonstrate with but "what you demonstrate for." The text was not printed – one reason he resigned from the Volksstimme editorial team and ultimately from the party in spring 2023. The party's reaction is an expression of the fact that political activists would no longer analyze in the categories of oppressors and oppressed, but rather "attitude and identity became the central category," Reitter describes, adding, "The left was caught up in the swamp of defending the Corona and Ukraine." He, therefore, describes them as the "fair weather left." "When the social pressure is there, the party and the activists duck away and stay silent." The journalist and publisher Hannes Hofbauer has been observing the departure of the left and the KPÖ party from the peace movement for some time. The Ukraine war is not the first "where the KPÖ behaved incorrectly." He can remember that even during the NATO bombing of Serbia, some in the party refused to take to the streets against the imperialist aggression. "Due to the reorientation of the KPÖ in recent years, it is no longer clear that they are against war," Hofbauer believes. He also believes a new movement against war can only emerge with other actors because there is opposition to the war in Ukraine and Palestine among the population in Europe. Today, new groups, especially young people with a migrant background and those who no longer feel represented by the parties are taking to the streets. Everyone I spoke to emphasized the situation. On the other hand, the historical European left would have given up: together with former anti-war party Greens, it has arrived in political mainstream, defending imperialism and neoliberalism.

— Sourced by Al Mayadeen

Briefs

'Martial law or emergency may be an...

FROM PAGE 01
young and female supporters of the party had pulled off a "miracle" despite obstacles. "If you don't give respect and justice in this country then people will find alternate path." Meanwhile, Jamaat-i-Islami Karachi chief Hafiz Naeem castigated what he said was the rule of a mafia in Sindh's urban and rural areas. Addressing a power show of the Grand Democratic Alliance in Jamshoro, he said a movement launched by the party would rid the people of the mafia's control. "Urban feudals have been imposed over Karachi. You know that the MQM-P obtained not even 100,000 genuine seats in the election and it was given 15 NA and 25 provincial seats. They are terrorists who deal in bodies," he said.

Petition seeking to...

FROM PAGE 01
The Feb 8 polls suffered from inordinate delay, raising doubts over elections' transparency. The United States has also urged Pakistani authorities to hold an independent probe into the claims of irregularities and rigging during the February 8 general elections in the country through its legal system. Meanwhile, the chief justice of the Sindh High Court (SHC) has formed a tribunal for hearing petitions pertaining to rigging in the February 8 general elections. The announcement was made by the Registrar of the SHC in a notification on Friday. According to the notification, the principal seat of the high court will hear election pleas in Karachi. The notification said the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Sindh had written a letter seeking the formation of a tribunal to hear petitions related to rigging in elections.

'Bajwa urged...

FROM PAGE 01
led by Bajwa at the time, for letting the then-dispensation in Islamabad go ahead with the alleged conspiracy. The US has repeatedly denied any interference. In a TV interview last night, Fazl had said: "They (Bajwa and Faiz) were in contact with all political parties regarding the no-confidence motion and they told us the way of going about it." However on Friday the JUI Chief made it clear that name of Gen Faiz was wrongly mentioned during the interview. When asked whether the move was the brainchild of the two generals, the JUI-F chief replied in the affirmative but added that ultimately, both the PPP and the PML-N had supported the move.

Fazl benefited...

FROM PAGE 01
as a "political change". Faisal Kundi said the political negotiations between the two parties were 'good' but urged that previous comments should be played on television channels when the PPP and the PML-N made any alliance. Faisal Kundi said that JUI-F chief had alleged that his party's mandate was stolen. "If it was stolen, then who was it given to? To the same delegation who visited him yesterday."

PTI to play 'opposit...

FROM PAGE 01
power lust but we have decided to sit in the opposition in the Centre and Punjab, despite the fact that if we had got the seats according to the votes we received, we would have been forming the government in the Centre," he said. Saif added that the Form-45s were the evidence that the PTI-backed candidates had won but the results were changed in the Form-47s. He said that party was making contacts with political parties on Khan's orders, and that is why a delegation led by Asad Qaiser visited the QWP secretariat.

HBL PSL 9 2024 all set to kick off today

Lahore Qalandars will take on Islamabad United in opening fixture at Gaddafi Stadium on Saturday

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

LAHORE: The ninth edition of the PSL is all set to commence today, when Lahore Qalandars, two-time champions (2022 and 2023), will take on Islamabad United, who are also two-time champions (2016 and 2018), in the opening fixture at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. The thrilling match between the two sides is expected to begin at 8pm, according to Pakistan time. In the double-header, the afternoon match will begin at 2pm, while the first ball of the evening match will be bowled at 7pm. The matches taking place during Ramadan will begin at 9pm. It is pertinent to mention here that the Lahore stadium will host its first opening ceremony of the PSL. Ali Zafar, Aima Baig to enthrall audience. The ceremony will kick off at 630pm with an array of exciting performances from renowned artist Arif Lohar, Natasha Baig, pop band Noori, and the singers of the PSL 9 anthem song Ali Zafar and Aima Baig. Fans will also be treated to spectacular fireworks and a mesmerising laser show. The tournament will see four cities, Karachi, Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi host 34 matches of the marquee event. As per the details, Lahore stadium will host nine matches, which includes Qalandars



playing five matches on their home turf. The picturesque Multan Cricket Stadium will host five matches - all Multan Sultans fixtures. Lahore and Multan will host the first leg of the league from 17 to 27 February before action moves to Karachi and Rawalpindi. Pindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi will host nine matches from March 2 to 10 with United featuring in five matches. Peshawar Zalmi will play four of their 10 matches in Rawalpindi, while Quetta Gladiators will play three matches at the Pindi Cricket Stadium. Karachi's National Bank Stadium will host 11 matches including the grand finale on March 18. The home side Karachi Kings will play a minimum of five matches at the venue, while Gladiators will get to play at

least three matches at the stadium. **Captains' thoughts:** United's skipper Shadab Khan said: "I have been captain of Islamabad United for the last four seasons and I want to lift the trophy for my team this season." "The additions of Imad Wasim and the Shah brothers are a huge boost for the franchise. Faheem Ashraf and Azam Khan are two vital cogs in our team. I want my team to stand tall in high-pressure games and get over the line." He said they had evaluated their mistakes from the last season and were looking forward to executing their plans aptly that time around. Kings captain Shan Masood remarked: "To represent and lead my hometown team Karachi in the PSL is such

a huge honour." "It is a rebuilding process for Karachi Kings, where we are looking to build a core group of young players who can serve the franchise for the next five years." He said they had a great chance to do well given the last part of the tournament was set to take place in Karachi. Qalandars' Shaheen Shah Afridi said: "I am genuinely excited to be leading Lahore Qalandars for the third consecutive season in PSL and the hunt for a hat-trick of titles makes me eager to do well." He said they were eying a third PSL win this time and he could assure the people that his team would show the same intensity as they have done in the past two seasons. "Lahore Qalandars are proud of having a strong fan base and our games in Lahore are going to be jam-packed," he added. Sultans skipper Mohammad Rizwan said: "PSL is a world-class league and we are all proud to be a part of this league." Multan's pacers and emerging players had dominated the previous two seasons and that was one of the reasons of Sultans doing well consistently, he added. Rizwan said this season they had got a strong squad as well and would look to maintain the standards. "Multan crowds have given us a lot of love over the last two seasons and hopefully, they will again support us with the same enthusiasm this year," he added.

Mohammad Hafeez reacts after parting ways with PCB

LAHORE: Former Pakistan captain Mohammad Hafeez has opened up after he parted ways with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) as director of the men's national side. Taking to X, formerly Twitter, Hafeez said that his "tenure of four years was cut short to two months". The former all-rounder also said that he will "reveal all the cricketing and other amateur non-cricketing facts which ensue bad performances". Earlier, according to sources, Hafeez wanted to meet newly-appointed PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi and submit his report about the tour of Australia and New Zealand. However, Naqvi didn't give Hafeez time for the meeting. Sources added that the PCB isn't interested in working with Hafeez which is why the two parties have decided to part ways. Former Test captain Hafeez was given the responsibility of Director Cricket in November last year. For the unversed, Mohammad Hafeez replaced Mickey Arthur as the Director of the Pakistan Men's Team in November, following Pakistan's failure to qualify for the semi-finals of the



ICC World Cup 2023, held in India. In his first assignment, Pakistan toured Australia for a three-match Test series and suffered a clean sweep, extending their losing streak Down Under. Hafeez has featured for Pakistan in 55 Tests, 218 ODIs and 119 T20Is and has scored 12,780 runs while also bagging 253 wickets. Previously, it was also reported that the relationship between Hafeez and senior players was less than ideal during the tour of New Zealand. According to sources, the players were unhappy with the long meetings conducted by Hafeez as well as the latter's stern approach with regards to the management of the team. Additionally, No Objection Certificates (NOCs) were issued to star cricketers, Shaheen Afridi, Shadab Khan, Azam Khan and others, for their participation in the T20. However, when players asked for NOCs for the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), Hafeez hesitated, putting their contracts in jeopardy. Team sources added that it is possible that the relationship between Hafeez and the players could worsen if there is no change in the way both parties are handling things at the moment.

Moin hopeful QG will adopt aggressive approach

LAHORE: Former Pakistan captain and Director Quetta Gladiators Moin Khan on Thursday was hopeful that both head coach Shane Watson and skipper Rilee Rossouw will adopt an aggressive approach in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine. "Hopefully our team this time will have an aggressive approach which both Rilee and Watson will bring into the side," Moin told The News in an interview. "Bringing Rilee and Watson as skipper and head coach respectively is very crucial and an aggressive approach should be there. This team won the PSL and Gladiators' sting was eminent but unfortunately combinations could not be formed at certain stages due to injuries and players' availability. It looked at times difficult for both me as head coach and Sarfaraz as skipper to form a team," Moin recalled. He served as Gladiators head coach during the last eight years and he was this season elevated as Team Director while Sarfaraz Ahmed, who had skippered the side since 2016, was replaced by South Africa's left-handed aggressive batter Rilee Rossouw. "This time the team is assembled for most of the matches and it will be easy for both Rilee and Watson to form a good combination and then carry it," Moin said. "It makes a difference when you have such aggressive players who as captains are aggressive and their aggression reflects in the team. The T20 cricket is all about aggressive approach. You have to put constant pressure on the opposition and the team which keeps constant effort clicks somewhere," said Moin, also a former Test stumper. Asked how he feels that both he and Sarfaraz have lost their posts of head coach and skipper, respectively, Moin said: "Look, in careers such stages come when you are promoted to serve in another capacity. And as a cricketer I think young blood should come forward. - Agencies

Osaka, Krejckikova pull out of Dubai Championships

The Japanese player fell in the first round of the Australian Open and in Abu Dhabi, and lost to Karolina Pliskova in the Qatar Open quarter-finals

RIYADH: Four-times Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka and holder Barbora Krejckikova have pulled out of the Dubai Tennis Championships. Osaka is still trying to find her feet on tour after returning to the circuit last month following a maternity break. The Japanese player fell in the first round of the Australian Open and in Abu Dhabi, and lost to Karolina Pliskova in the Qatar Open quarter-finals on Thursday. "I'm really sorry that I have to withdraw from the Dubai Tennis Championships this season," Osaka, whose last appearance in the event was five years ago, said in a statement on the tournament's website. Osaka falls at first hurdle in Abu Dhabi. Former French Open Krejckikova champion, who won her maiden Dubai title last year after defeating world number one Iga Swiatek in straight sets, withdrew due to a back injury. "This decision wasn't easy, especially given my fond memories and anticipation to compete again. - Agencies

Ashwin joins elite company after 500th Test wicket

The five-Test series is level at 1-1 after England won the opener in Hyderabad and India bounced back in the second match

NEW DELHI: Ravichandran Ashwin joined elite company after he became the second-fastest to 500 wickets in the ongoing third Test against England on Friday. Ashwin also went past legendary Indian spinner Anil Kumble to become the quickest Indian with 500 scalps. Ashwin achieved the feat on the second day at the Saurashtra's Niranjan Shah Stadium after he provided the breakthrough for India and secured the wicket of Zak Crawley in the third session of the day. Ashwin reached the milestone in his 98th Test, which takes him past Kumble, who needed 105 matches. Sri Lanka's legend Muttiah Muralitharan tops the list with just 87 Tests. Earlier, Ashwin (37) and debutant Dhruv Jurel (46) put on a stubborn

eight-wicket stand of 77 before England wrapped up the Indian innings in the second session on day two. India lost two early wickets but Ashwin and Jurel batted with patience and occasional boundaries to tackle a persistent England attack which was rotated by skipper Ben Stokes in his landmark 100th Test. Rehan Ahmed sent back Ashwin with his leg-spin in the afternoon and then got Jurel caught behind on a delivery that pitched and turned sharply. Number 10 Bumrah hit a breezy 26 to frustrate England before Wood got him lbw to finish 4-114 af-

ter his three strikes on day one. Fast bowler James Anderson struck first to get nightwatchman Kuldeep Yadav caught behind for four. Anderson moved to 696 Test wickets over 185 matches since his 2003 debut. The 41-year-old seamer is poised to become only the third bowler in history to reach 700 wickets after Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan (800) and late Australian spin wizard Shane Warne (708). Part-time spinner Joe Root had overnight centurion Ravindra Jadeja caught and bowled on 112 as the hosts lost two wickets in the first five overs of the day. - Agencies

NZ win South Africa Test series for first time

Williamson's unbeaten 133 was at the heart of their 269-3 in the fourth innings of a tight Test in Hamilton to complete a 2-0 series win

SPORTS DESK

HAMILTON: New Zealand won a Test series against South Africa for the first time with Kane Williamson hitting an unbeaten century Friday to steer them to a seven-wicket victory in the second Test. Williamson's unbeaten 133 was at the heart of their 269-3 in the fourth innings of a tight Test in Hamilton to complete a 2-0 series win over the understrength tourists. The Black Caps hadn't beaten the Proteas in 17 previous Test series dating back to 1931, having lost 13 and drawn four. The 33-year-old Williamson was methodical throughout a 260-ball stay, putting on an unbroken stand of 152 with Will Young, who scored 60 not out, as New Zealand reached their target of 267 late on day four. The in-form Williamson scored his seventh century in his last seven Tests, which included twin tons in the 281-run first Test victory at Mount Maunganui. His 32 centuries have come from 172 innings, surpassing Australia's Steve Smith (174 innings) as the fastest player in Test history to reach that milestone. Williamson batted through the day after



New Zealand resumed at 40-1, adopting a disciplined approach on a tricky pitch, but was always prepared to punish loose deliveries, scoring 12 fours and two sixes. New Zealand seamer Will O'Rourke finished with nine wickets on his Test debut to earn the man-of-the-match award with Williamson named player of the series. New Zealand briefly wobbled when opener Tom Latham was dismissed in the first session for 30 and Rachin Ravindra soon after lunch for 20, but Young dug in to reach his seventh half-century. The inexperienced Proteas struggled to make an impact aside from Dane Piedt, who finished with 3-93 to give him eight scalps in his first Test in more than four years. Offspinner Piedt struck early by removing Latham, the opener caught by Zubayr Hamza driving to short cover after adding nine to his overnight score. Centurion Bedingham 'confident' Proteas can level New Zealand series Ravindra was undone by a near-identical shot after New Zealand had resumed the second session at 107-2. South Africa were fielding a side missing the majority of their first-choice players, who skipped the series to instead contest their lucrative domestic Twenty20 league.

Pak now classified...

FROM PAGE 01
Democratic standards across the world fell in 2023 amid the spread of wars, authoritarian crackdowns and declining levels of trust in mainstream political parties, the EIU said. The number of countries classified as democracies increased by two, to 74, in 2023. However, measured by other metrics, the year was not an auspicious one for democracy, as per the report. The global average index score fell to 5.23, down from 5.29 in 2022. This is in keeping with a general trend of regression and stagnation in recent years, and it marks a new low since the index began in 2006. Most of the regression occurred among the non-democracies classified as "hybrid regimes" and "authoritarian regimes".

Putin critic Alexei...

FROM PAGE 01
district said Navalny had "felt unwell" after a walk on Friday. He had "almost immediately lost consciousness", it said in a statement, adding that an emergency medical team had immediately been called and tried to resuscitate him but without success. "The emergency doctors declared the prisoner dead. Cause of death is being established." Navalny, 47, was last seen only a day ago, looking well and laughing during a court hearing via video link. His lawyer Leonid Solovoyov told Russian media he would not be commenting yet, although Navalny's close aide Leonid Volkov wrote on X: "Russian authorities publish a confession that they killed Alexei Navalny in prison. We do not have any way to confirm it or to prove this isn't true."

February 8 polls...

FROM PAGE 01
pected by the political actors as none of them got a simple majority. While the PTI-affiliated independent candidates dominated the election results, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) claimed to have enough numbers to form the government as some independents joined the Nawaz Sharif-led party post-polls. However, maintaining its stance of having the majority, the PTI also alleges that the polls were "not free and fair" and plans to stage countrywide peaceful protests against the alleged rigging. Hassan said that the candidates who were winning as per Form 45 - collected from polling stations in a constituency - were later declared runners-up in Form 47 - the consolidated result of a constituency. He claimed a huge gap in votes polled for the national and provincial assemblies' seats.

Imran seeking...

FROM PAGE 01
slogan of "Absolutely Not. We are not slaves" went when he urged the US to adopt a tough stance on 'rigging' in the recent general elections in Pakistan. Marriyum said that if anyone has objections to election results, they should approach the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). She criticised the propaganda being spread regarding non-definite results in the media. She emphasised that while they are not the spokespersons for the ECP, these are the laws.

SJC decides not to...

FROM PAGE 01
Qazi Faiz Isa which recorded the statements of four witnesses regarding the allotment of government plots to now-resigned judge Mazahir Naqvi. The SJC adjourned further proceedings indefinitely. Earlier, Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi said that after his resignation, the Supreme Judicial Council has "no jurisdiction to initiate or continue with any proceedings" against him. The former judge is facing an inquiry over allegations of misconduct, a show-cause notice about which was issued in October last year. In a letter penned to CJP Qazi Faez Isa and all top court judges in December, he had stated that the treatment meted out to him by the SJC was "nothing short of disgraceful".

Briefs

Ireland pledges UNRWA funding after US withdrawal

DUBLIN: Ireland has pledged 20 million (\$16.7 million) funding for the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees after the US and its allies suspended their assistance for the agency based on unsubstantiated Israeli allegations. On Thursday, Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defense, Micheál Martin, affirmed his country's insistence on sustaining its assistance to the agency. Martin, who was speaking at a joint news conference with Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Philippe Lazzarini in Dublin, called the agency's work a "lifeline" for the displaced Palestinians in Gaza. "There is no replacement for UNRWA's work in Gaza," the Irish top diplomat said. The prime ministers of Ireland and Spain voiced their concern in a letter to EU Commission. Led by the United States, a whole host of states, namely Canada, Australia, Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, Estonia, Japan, Austria, and Romania withdrew their financial support for the agency. UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said dismantling the UN agency for Palestinian refugees would be a disaster.—APP

Senegal's top court reverses Sall's election delay bid

DAKAR: Senegal's top election authority on voided the government's postponement of a presidential election scheduled for February 25 and its rescheduling for December, ruling that the moves were unconstitutional. The constitutional council cancelled the decree signed by President Macky Sall earlier this month that postponed the election, according to a judgement approved by seven members of the body and seen by the Associated Press. The National Assembly's decision on February 5 to reschedule the vote for December 15 also was "contrary to the constitution," the judgement said. "The constitutional council, noting the impossibility of organising the presidential election on the date initially planned, invites the competent authorities to hold it as soon as possible," it added. The constitutional council also reiterated the fixed nature of the five-year presidential term. Opposition figures praised the court's ruling on Thursday. "This is a decision that puts Senegal back on track. I'm not surprised because everything that was happening was too big," former prime minister Aminata Toure, who has joined the opposition, told AFP.

Shunichi says a weak yen has merits and demerits

TOKYO: Japanese Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki said on Friday that a weak yen has its merits and demerits although he was concerned about the negative aspects of a weak currency. "Currency rates are set by markets reflecting fundamentals. Rapid moves are undesirable and stable moves are desirable," Suzuki told a lower house session of parliament. "From that standpoint, I'm closely watching market moves with a strong sense of urgency." Japan finance minister says he discussed debt restructuring progress with Sri Lanka. The dollar was on track for its fifth straight weekly gain as investors take stock of economic data and firm expectations the Federal Reserve will start to cut rates in June, while the yen traded at the psychologically key 150 per dollar level.—APP

"Pakistan cultural corner" at Borisov central library

This corner showcases a collection of Pakistani artwork, literature, and artifacts, introducing the cultural and artistic heritage of Pakistan

DMA

MINSK: As part of the 30th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Diplomatic Relations between Pakistan and Belarus, Ambassador of Pakistan to Belarus Sajjad Haider Khan and Deputy Chairman of District Executive Committee Mr. Nikolai Shvaibovich jointly inaugurated a "Pakistan Cultural Corner" in Borisov Central Library on February 15, 2024. This corner showcases a collection of Pakistani artwork, literature, and artifacts, introducing the cultural and artistic heritage of Pakistan. Over the past three years, the Embassy has been actively promoting collaborations by



hosting various art-related events including master classes by prominent Pakistani Artists at the Borisov Central Library.

The event was attended by the Head of the Cultural Department of Borisov District Executive Committee Ms. Skakun Natalia, representatives of Borisov District Executive Committee, Pakistani diaspora, Mass Media representatives and library staff. As Pakistan and Belarus look forward to further strengthening their bilateral relations, initiatives like the cultural corner signify the eagerness and commitment of both countries in establishing more meaningful cultural, artistic, and educational collaborations.

Labour deals double blow to Sunak's conservatives

WEB DESK

LONDON: Britain's Labour Party dealt a crushing blow to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservatives on Friday, winning contests for two new lawmakers in votes that indicated the opposition party was on track to win a national election later this year. The double defeat underlined the flagging fortunes of the governing party and will do little to silence Sunak's critics, who fear the Conservatives could be trounced at the national election and want him to change course. The 43-year-old former investment banker has struggled to restore his party's fortunes despite recasting himself at various points over the past year as a bold reformer, a stable technocrat and now as someone who needs more time "to stick to the plan" because, he says, that plan is working. But with the Labour Party ahead in the polls, Sunak might feel the need to bend to the demands of some in his party to offer an increasingly disaffected elec-

torate a more right-wing conservative agenda before the election. "By winning in these Tory strongholds, we can confidently say that Labour is back in the service of working people and we will work tirelessly to deliver for them," Labour leader Keir Starmer said in a statement. "The Tories (Conservatives) have failed. Rishi's recession proves that. That's why we've seen so many former Conservative voters switching directly to this changed Labour Party." Labour overturned a hefty Conservative majority in the central English town of Wellingborough to win the parliamentary seat with 13,844 votes against 7,408 in what polling expert John Curtice described as the governing party's "worst ever by-election reverse." In another threat to Sunak's party, the candidate for the right-wing Reform Party won 3,919 votes, a sign, Curtice said, it had "now entered the electoral battle in a serious way ... that potentially adds to the Conservatives' difficulties". Addressing that threat, Conservative Party Chairman Richard Holden told Times

Radio a vote for Reform was a vote for Labour. "I don't think what we're seeing is that big switch to Labour ... but I think you are seeing Conservative voters, not at this stage willing to come out at the moment and support the government." In Kingswood, southwest England, Labour won with 11,176 votes against 8,675 for the Conservative candidate. Reform received 2,578 votes. It appeared that the Conservatives had all but written off the two by-elections. While Labour sent many of its lawmakers and activists to campaign in both places, the Conservatives had a muted presence. The party has only won four out of 21 by-elections since the last national election in 2019. While so-called by-elections are often lost by the governing party, the scale of the defeat in two parliamentary seats the Conservatives have held for years piles pressure on Sunak, who became prime minister just over a year ago. The challenge from the Reform Party adds a new dimension. Senior Conservative lawmaker Jacob Rees-Mogg

said at least in Kingswood, if Reform supporters had voted for the governing party as part of the "Conservative family", the Conservatives would have held the parliamentary seat. Few Conservatives believed they had any chance of winning in either place - the contest in Wellingborough was triggered after the former member of parliament was forced out over a bullying and harassment scandal, while in Kingswood, former minister Chris Skidmore resigned over Sunak's climate change policies. But some had hoped Labour might have been damaged this week when Starmer did not move immediately to censure a Labour candidate who was recorded espousing conspiracy theories about Israel and for scrapping a green investment target. But with turnout low, voters punished the governing party and Sunak, who is struggling to meet his election promises, including a vow to grow the economy. Data on Thursday showed it had slipped into recession in the second half of 2023.

Artisans fear future in Florence 'dying' of tourism

FLORENCE: Goldsmith Tommaso Pestelli was evicted from his historic Florence workshop to make way for a luxury hotel, the umpteenth victim of a mass tourism critics say is ravaging the Italian city. Calls for urgent action to protect the city centre, a UNESCO site, intensified last month after a museum director said "hit and run" tourism had transformed Florence into a "prostitute". Some 1.5 million tourists flocked to the city last summer, up 6.6 percent on the previous year, while an increasing number of independent shops and residential apartments are being transformed into fast food outlets and holiday lets. "We've been open since 1908. If you get rid of us, and many others like us, you take away part of the city's spirit," said Pestelli, whose father, grandfather and great-grandfather were goldsmiths before him. Pestelli, 55, managed to find another little workshop nearby, but says many fellow artisans have not been so lucky. The average cost of monthly residential rents leapt 42 percent between 2016 and 2023, while the number of apartments listed on Airbnb jumped from some 6,000 to nearly 15,000, official figures show. Even in February, tourist queues snake around the block at the Duomo and through around Michelangelo's David. With locals forced out and traditional shops disappearing, "Florence is becoming an empty box", Pestelli said. Elena Bellini, 47, who sells work by local artists, said the drop in the number of long-term residents was killing neighbourhoods and had led to more crime, like attempted break-ins. "Florence is dying!" read a notice in the window of a jewellers saying the city had been "sold" to big business. The Tuscan capital is not alone. Venice and other top destinations like the Cinque Terre in northwest Italy have also seen locals driven away by astronomical rents, overcrowded sites and endless souvenir shops. While Venice is trialling a ticketing system, with day visitors to be charged an entry fee in high seasons, Florence's centre-left city council has launched a campaign to entice tourists away from the centre.—DNA

Maduro slams Milei after US seizes Venezuelan plane

BERLIN: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has lashed out at his Argentine counterpart, three days after the United States completed the seizure of a Venezuelan plane held in Buenos Aires since June 2022. "They stole our plane... Milei the bandit stole the plane from Venezuela. Javier Milei, the hero of the extreme right," Maduro said on Thursday in a televised statement about the Argentine president. "He acts crazy or he is crazy or both at the same time," he added. The Boeing 747 cargo plane owned by Venezuelan company Emtrasur has been held in Argentina since landing there in 2022 from Mexico with a shipment of auto parts. The 19-member crew was comprised of Venezuelans and Iranians - one of whom the United States suspected had links to the Al Quds Force, a group of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard classified as a terrorist organization by the United States. All the crew were initially detained but later freed. The plane was sold to Emtrasur, a subsidiary of state airline Conviasa, by Iran's Mahan Air in October 2021 which the US said contravened its sanctions against both countries. Caracas and Tehran protested US attempts to seize the plane, but an Argentinian judge last month ordered it surrendered to the United States. "The seized American-built aircraft was transferred by a sanctioned Iranian airline in a transaction that violated US export control laws and directly benefited the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is a designated terrorist organization," US Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen of the Justice Department's National Security Division said in a statement this week. "Mahan Air - known to ferry weapons and fighters for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry Chairman Khurshid Barlas Madam Taqdees Gilani is giving shield to Minister Small Industry Travels and Tours Amjad Jali Chairman BOI Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Sardar Abdul Khaliq Abbasi Director Small Industries Fahad Barlas Convener Exhibition is also present on this occasion.—DNA

Zelensky signs 'historic' security pact with Germany

Zelensky's European tour comes at a critical time as Ukraine faces mounting pressure on the eastern frontlines

FOREIGN DESK

BERLIN: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a security deal with Germany on Friday in Berlin, hailed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz as a "historic step" amid Kyiv's raging battles against Russia. Zelensky will also seal a similar deal with France later Wednesday, as he seeks to shore up help for his forces, who are struggling to hold off Russian attacks on the frontline city of Avdiivka. With the Ukraine war about to enter a third year, the president was to make a new plea for sustained help on financing and armaments at the Munich Security Conference, where leaders like US Vice President Kamala Harris are to gather. Zelensky's European tour comes at a critical time as Ukraine faces mounting pressure on the eastern frontlines because of ammunition shortages and fresh Russian attacks. Fierce fighting raged around beleaguered Avdiivka, on the eastern frontline, which has become a main Russian target ahead of the February 24 invasion

anniversary. The long-term future of billions of dollars of Western aid is meanwhile in doubt, with the biggest contributor, the United States, in the throes of an election year. Macron, Zelensky to sign security deal in Paris Friday A possible \$60-billion package of military aid has been held up in Washington since last

year because of wrangling in Congress. The EU has also admitted that it will only be able to make good on half of the one million artillery shells it promised to send by March. No details have emerged yet on the bilateral pact signed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Zelensky, with Germany saying only that

it would cover Ukraine's "long-term security commitments and support". But Scholz said the signing of the deal was "a historic step". "Germany will continue to support Ukraine against Russia's war," he wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. The French presidency confirmed that a security agreement would

be signed on Friday evening, but did not provide any specifics on its content. War fatigue G7 nations flagged plans to provide Ukraine with long-term defence support on the sidelines of the NATO summit last July. Alliance leaders failed, however, to set a timetable for Ukraine to join the bloc. A first agreement had been signed with Britain in January, during British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's visit to Kyiv. Zelensky is seeking to shake off any war fatigue besetting his allies. Besides meeting Harris on Saturday on the sidelines of the Munich conference, talks are also planned with the leaders of the Czech Republic, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Ukraine was once the main conflict on the minds of world leaders but Israel's war on Hamas and the ensuing escalating crisis in the Middle East now also require urgent attention. Both conflicts will dominate the Munich conference, on and off stage. Mideast in focus Israel's President Isaac Herzog, Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayeh and Jordan's King Abdullah II count among 180 dignitaries at the conference.



Belarus detains Ukrainian sabotage group at border

MOSCOW: A Ukrainian sabotage group was detained as a result of a counter terrorism operation, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko said on Friday. The group detained on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border was engaged in transporting explosives from Ukraine to Belarus and Russia, Lukashenko told reporters in Minsk. "Just today, several saboteurs were detained on the Ukrainian border. With the help of drones, some of the Ukrainian citizens crawled across the marshes to our border, were transferring explosives to commit sabotage primarily on the territory of Russia and Belarus," he said. According to him, incidents involving attempts to infiltrate saboteurs into Belarus occur up to three times a week. The Belarusian authorities declared on Thursday a counter-terrorism operation in Lelchitsky district of Homiel region, which adjoins Ukraine's Zhytomyr Oblast. The Belarusian authorities have repeatedly accused Ukraine of sending sabotage groups to the country. The former Soviet republic has supported Moscow in its "special military operation" against Kyiv.—APP

Thailand's visa drop boosts Chinese tourism

BANGKOK: Bangkok's Chinatown, lit up by red lanterns and decorative banners to celebrate the Lunar New Year holidays, is bustling. As the region welcomed the Year of the Dragon last weekend, ethnic Chinese Thais thronged temples to light candles and pray for good fortune. Inside the glowing red interior of Wat Mangkon Kamalawat - the largest Chinese temple in Bangkok - women wore traditional cheongsam dresses and took photos with their loved ones. Outside, in the hustle and bustle of Yaowarat Road, lion dancers performed as visitors - Thais and legions of tourists - crowded the street, sampling the food and shopping from stalls in the market. Many were from China, with official figures showing hundreds of thousands of Chinese nationals chose to spend the holiday, which began on February 10, in Thailand where they no longer need to get a visa. "Destinations in Southeast Asia traditionally rely on a strong Lunar New Year holiday to kick-start the tourism calendar," Gary Bowerman, a tourism analyst in Kuala Lumpur, told Al Jazeera. "Thailand has positioned itself astutely to capture outbound travel demand from China with its bilateral visa waiver and aggressive marketing into the Chinese market led by the prime minister. This resonates well with Chinese tourists and has encouraged Chinese airlines to add more capacity over [the] Chinese New Year.—APP

Tokyo stocks surge after US rallies

TOKYO: Tokyo shares surged in morning trade on Friday, supported by US rallies as investors shrugged off weak retail sales data. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index was up 1.66 percent, or 634.17 points, at 38,792.11, while the broader Topix index added 1.32 percent, or 34.28 points, to 2,626.13. Overnight on Wall Street, the Dow Jones Industrial Average finished up 0.9 percent, the S&P 500 gained 0.6 percent and the tech-rich Nasdaq added 0.3 percent. "Japanese markets are expected to be led by gains following rallies in US shares," Matsui Securities said. Even as the Nikkei approaches its highest-ever closing value of 38,915.87, a record set in December 1989, "there is no overheating" felt in the market, SBI Securities senior strategist Ichiro Asai told AFP. US chip equipment maker Applied Materials "announced a brisk earnings report in Tokyo's early morning hours", which is supporting tech shares, Asai said. Other positive factors include the "relatively low price of Japanese shares" compared to those on overseas markets, partly helped by the cheaper yen, he said.—APP

Briefs

Imran Khan challenges Toshakhana, cypher sentences

Petitioners pray to court judgments 'illegal and unconstitutional' under Article 10A

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi challenged their respective sentences on Friday in the Toshakhana and cypher cases. The appeals argue that both Imran and Bushra were subjected to a sham trial, where the courts not only proceeded unfairly and hastily but also ignored their fundamental right to a fair trial and due process. The lead counsel, Barrister Syed Ali Zafar, filed two appeals, writ petitions, and applications, challenging the orders passed by the special judge and NAB during the jail trials of the Toshakhana and cypher cases. Barrister Zafar has contended that the ex-premier and his wife have been erroneously convicted and sentenced by the accountability court and the special judge. The appeal further argued that their freedom and liberty have been curtailed, blatantly violating their fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973. The evidence presented against them is deficient in every manner and fails to connect them with the alleged charges.

Rana Sana tipped to be made Punjab governor

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has decided to name party's veteran Rana Sanaulah as Punjab governor after taking reins of the federal government. Sana, the party's incumbent provincial president, lost his seat to PTI-backed independent candidate Nisar Jutt from his home constituency of Faisalabad on Feb 8. According to sources, Rana Sanaulah is likely to sit in Governor House to support Maryam Nawaz who has been named as the chief minister candidate by the party. The sources claimed that Maryam Nawaz is a newcomer in the parliamentary politics and party believes that a senior leader must sit in Punjab to help her in running the government affairs.

SC fixes ZAB case on Feb 20

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan (ECP) on Friday appointed murder case of former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for the presidential reference hearing. SC nine-member bench, headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa, will hear the case on February 20. Other members include Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Aminuddin Khan and Justice Jamal Khan Mandukhel. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Musrat Hilali are also part of the larger bench. - DNA



KABUL: Ilham Mammadov, Azerbaijan ambassador to Afghanistan presented his credentials to Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan. For the first time in the history of Azerbaijan-Afghanistan relations the flag of Azerbaijan is flying in Kabul. The Embassy of Azerbaijan has commenced its mission. Ilham has also served in Pakistan for many years. Apart from other languages, Ilham had full command over Urdu language as well. - DNA

'Bushra Bibi's life in danger at Bani Gala'

"Bushra has been treated badly by jail authorities," says her sister, Maryam Riaz Wattoo

LONDON: Maryam Riaz Wattoo, the sister of former first lady Bushra Imran Khan, has claimed that her sister's life is in danger at Bani Gala, where she is under house arrest. Bushra, the wife of former prime minister Imran Khan, was placed under house arrest at her husband's Islamabad mansion after she and her husband were convicted of graft allegations. Khan and his wife were sentenced to 14 years in jail in a case that relates to accusations the ex-premier undervalued gifts from a state repository and gained profits from selling them while he held the country's top office. Wattoo told Geo News that she is very concerned about the safety of her sister as "Bushra has been treated badly by the jail authorities". She said the jail superintendent Adiala is responsible for the safety of Bushra but "evidence" shows that the jail authorities are failing in their duty. Wattoo, Bushra's younger sister, who is an educationist by profession and based in Dubai, said her sister's daughter met her after more than 10 days and informed that Bushra was given "some weird, very strong-tasting food six days ago which has burnt her throat and stomach completely such that since last six days she has not been able to eat anything, has gone very weak and is not well". - Agencies

Gaza carnage underscores 'fragmented' world order

Palestinian Health Ministry confirmed that the tally of casualties as a result of Israeli brutal aggression on Gaza Strip has mounted to 28,775

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says the war on Gaza highlights how divided world geopolitics is with a global order that's "not working for anyone". "The situation in Gaza is an appalling indictment of the deadlock in global relations. The level of death and destruction is shocking in itself, and the war is also spilling over borders across the region and affecting global trade," Guterres said at the Munich Security Conference. The UN chief said the humanitarian aid operation is no longer on life support in Gaza but is barely functioning. "Humanitarians are working under unimaginable conditions including live-fire, multiple physical obstacles ... as well as the breakdown of public order." Meanwhile, The Palestinian Health Ministry announced on Friday that the Israeli occupation has committed ten massacres against Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip, claiming the lives of 112 martyrs and injuring 157 over the past 24 hours. The Ministry said in a press statement, "a number of victims are still under rubble and on the roads. Israeli occupation forces have been blocking the movement of ambulance and civil defense crews, preventing them from reaching the victims."

The Ministry confirmed that the tally of casualties as a result of the Israeli brutal aggression on the Gaza Strip since October 7 last year has mounted to 28,775 martyrs and 68,552 injuries. Since that date, the Israeli occupation army has been waging a destructive genocidal war on the Gaza Strip, leaving more than 110,000 martyrs, wounded, and missing, in addition to an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe and massive destruction of infrastructure. Meanwhile, Three Israelis were killed, and three others were injured in a shooting operation at a bus stop in Kiryat Malachi, east of Ashdod, on Friday afternoon. The Israeli medical sources confirmed that three Israelis were killed in the incident at the bus stop, while the Israeli police announced that 6 others suffered from serious and moderate injuries. Yedioth Ahronoth Hebrew newspaper confirmed that one of the wounded succumbed to his injuries. Israeli Channel 12 said that the shooter opened fire on a bus station with a number of settlers inside. The Israeli police asked all residents of Kiryat Malachi to stay indoors. Meanwhile, 25,000 Palestinian worshippers were allowed to perform Friday prayer in the Aqsa Mosque, as Israeli police banned the entry of hundreds of people into the holy site. The Islamic Endowments Department affirmed that 25,000 worshippers were allowed in as Israeli police continue to besiege the Old City since the October 7 events. Ahead of the Friday prayer, the Israeli police blocked several roads leading to the Old City of Jerusalem and hindered the movement of Palestinian citizens. Earlier on Friday, hundreds of Jerusalemites performed the Fajr prayer at the Aqsa Mosque despite the Israeli security restrictions at its gates. A group of Jerusalemite campaigners and activists earlier called for performing the Great Fajr prayer on Friday in the Aqsa Mosque's courtyards

and staying at the holy site to demand lifting the siege imposed on it. Meanwhile, The Amal Movement and Hezbollah announced on Friday the martyrdom of 5 of their members in clashes with the Israeli army in southern Lebanon. The Amal Movement mourned in a statement its members: "Ali Issa from the town of Jabshit (born in 1971), Muhammad Saeed from the town of Al-Qasiba (born in 1995), and Qasim Nizar Berro from the town of Al-Sharqiya (born in 1996)." The movement said that its fighters "were killed while fulfilling their duty in defense of Lebanon and the south." The official Lebanese News Agency reported that 3 Amal members were martyred in an Israeli raid on a house in the town of Qantara, south of Lebanon last night. For its part, Hezbollah announced the martyrdom of two of its members in confrontations with the Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. The party mourned in a statement each of Mustafa Kassir, born in 1991, from the town of Deir Qanun al-Nahr in southern Lebanon, and Muhammad Darwish, known as Mahdi and was born in 1995, from the town of Sarbin in southern Lebanon.

Amb Durrani to lead Pak delegation at Afghan moot

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Asif Durrani, Pakistan's Special Representative on Afghanistan, will lead the Pakistan delegation at the Meeting of the Special Envoys on Afghanistan to be held on 18-19 February 2024 in Doha. The meeting is being convened by the UN Secretary-General to discuss approaches for international engagement with Afghanistan in a more coherent and structured manner. Pakistan's participation in the meeting is part of our efforts to actively engage with the international community, including the United Nations, to strengthen the efforts for lasting peace and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Mushahid applauds Putin's stance on Islamophobia

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed paid a visit to Moscow to participate in the Constituent Meeting of the Forum of Supporters of the Struggle Against Modern Neocolonialism Practices for the Freedom of Nations on the invitation of United Russia Party (Ruling and Largest political party in RF). As part of the visit program Senator MHS participated as a panelist in the Forum and held a tete-a-tete with Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia/Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Global Forum Against Neo-Colonialism and for Freedom of Nations Mr. Dmitry Medvedev (Former President of Russian Federation). Dur-

Overall Senator Mushahid Hussain had a very successful visit to Moscow and his engagements with the Russian leadership and intelligentsia were a great contribution towards strengthening Pakistan-Russia relations

ing the visit Senator MHS also delivered a lecture at the Russian Diplomatic Academy. The topic of the talk was Pakistan and the changing regional scenario. Senator Hussain during his talk also highlighted the growing relations between Pakistan and Russia especially in the field of energy, connectivity, regional security including Afghanistan and cooperation at multilateral fora including SCO and UN. He also appreciated President Putin's stance on Islamophobia. The lecture was followed by a question and answer session from the students of the diplomatic academy. Senator Chizhov of the Russian Federation

Council also graced the occasion. Post the lecture the Senator held a meeting with the Rector of the Diplomatic academy to exchange views on the emerging trends in global politics as well as on bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Russia. The exchange of views proved to be constructive as both sides displayed congruence on a number of issues of mutual interest. Overall Senator Mushahid Hussain had a very successful visit to Moscow and his engagements with the Russian leadership and intelligentsia were a great contribution towards strengthening Pakistan-Russia relations.

US DCM bolsters Pak-US ties during Karachi visit

DCM Schofer stated the United States demonstrated its support for the people of Sindh during the time of climate disaster and post floods recovery efforts

NAZIR SIYAL


KARACHI: The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) of the United States Mission in Pakistan Andrew Schofer reinforced U.S. efforts to promote democracy, economic growth, and women's economic empowerment, and to further strengthen ties with the people of Pakistan during his visit to Karachi February 13-16. "We are committed to deepening our partnership with Pakistan and working together on our shared priorities that promote democracy, inclusive economic growth, and stability in the region. This visit to Karachi is the reflection of our commitment to our

continued engagement with diverse stakeholders and reinforcing our bilateral ties," said DCM Schofer. DCM Schofer stated the United States demonstrated its support for the people of Sindh during the time of climate disaster and post floods recovery efforts by extending over \$215 million in support for Sindh since 2022. With a focus on education, clean water, malnutrition, and

healthcare, the United States has been actively engaged in supporting the people of Sindh in their efforts to recover from the floods and build disaster resilience. Underscoring the U.S. commitment to promote women's entrepreneurship, DCM Schofer visited the USAID-supported Terry Tex International company in Karachi, an example of how USAID's support can empower local

businesses to expand their horizons. Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Schofer's visit to the Lincoln Corner at the Pakistan American Cultural Center brought together dynamic youth leaders, providing them with a unique platform for discussion. During his visit, DCM Schofer seized the opportunity to meet with private sector and civil society leaders across various sectors, including finance, pharmaceuticals, and textiles. These dialogues reinforced the importance of inclusive private sector-led growth, trade, and investment between Pakistan and the United States. DCM Schofer's visit also underscored the United States' commitment to addressing the challenges faced by Afghan refugees and vulnerable religious minorities in Pakistan. During his trip to Karachi, Deputy Chief of Mission Andrew Schofer met UNHCR officials and discussed pressing issues facing Afghan refugees, showcasing a commitment to humanitarian aid and support.





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