



# Islamabad POST

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**Kartarpur Corridor symbol of peace: President Alvi**

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**Ignores Khan's demand**

## IMF ready to work with new government

"We look forward to working with new government on policies to ensure macroeconomic stability," says IMF

NEWS DESK / DNA

NEW YORK: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has expressed willingness to work with the new Pakistani government while ignoring Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's demand from the lender to hold an audit of the election results before approving any new loan for Islamabad. Addressing a press briefing, IMF's Director Communications Julie Kozack said that on January 11, the lender brought total disbursements under the Standby Arrangement (SBA) to \$1.9 billion, adding that the programme is "supporting the authority's efforts to stabilise the economy and to, of course, with a strong focus on protecting the most vulnerable." The official also appreciated the interim setup, saying during the caretaker government's tenure, the authorities have maintained economic stability. "This has been done through strict adherence to fiscal targets while also protecting the social safety net. It has been done by maintaining a tight monetary policy stance to control inflation and to continue to build up foreign exchange reserves," she said. The spokesperson further added that they "look forward to working with the new government on policies to ensure macroeconomic stability and prosperity for all of Pakistan's citizens." When pressed to comment on the former prime minister Imran Khan's demand for an audit of poll results, she said, "I'm not going to comment on ongoing political developments." The IMF's statement came in response to the PTI founding chairman's decision to

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**Imran Khan confirms writing letter to IMF**

Former Rawalpindi commissioner was picked up and assaulted, now his software has been updated, he says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan shared on Friday that he has written a letter to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), asking the global lender to hold an audit of the election results before approving any new loan for Islamabad. "The letter has been written to the IMF and would be dispatched today. If the country gets a loan in such a situation, then who will return it?" Khan told the media during a hearing of the £190 million reference at Adiala Jail. The former prime minister warned that the loan would lead to more poverty, adding that till there is investment in the country loans of the country will keep on increasing. Khan's update about the letter comes a day after PTI senator Ali Zafar announced that the party founder had decided to write a letter to the global lender urging it to call for an

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: President Pakistan Hockey Federation Tariq Bugti and Olympian Khawaja Junaid presenting a souvenir to Australian High Commissioner Neil Hawks and Ambassador of Morocco Mohammad Karmouna on the occasion of Pakistan-Holland hockey match. More pictures and coverage is on Page 6. - DNA

**Protesting Indian farmers burn effigy of PM Modi**

Farmers also burnt effigies also of Home (interior) Minister Amit Shah

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI: Indian farmers demanding higher prices for their crops burned effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other ministers on Friday as they sought to expand their protest against his government months before elections. Thousands of farmers began a 'Delhi Chalo' (Let's go to Delhi) march last week but were stopped by

Continued on Page 06

**Maryam enters parliamentary politics**

## Newly-elected Punjab Assembly members take oath

Speaker Punjab Assembly Sibtain Khan said a level playing field has been provided to some lawmakers while not to others, in reference to obstacles being faced by PTI-backed independent candidates



ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Newly elected members of the Punjab Assembly took their oath on Friday in a session marred by reports of a PTI-backed lawmaker's arrest as

Continued on Page 06

**PPP picks Murad for Sindh CM slot**

Bilawal okays names for speaker and deputy speaker as well

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari revealed the crucial appointments for key positions in the Sindh Assembly during a party meeting held on Friday. The nominations include

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## Briefs

**Justice Shahzad will be new LHC CJ**

Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan authored several historic decisions

ABBAS HASHMI

LAHORE: Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan will take oath as the LHC Chief Justice on March 8. Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan, the senior-most judge of LHC, will be the 52nd Chief Justice. Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan authored several historic decisions. He is considered one of the courageous judges in the judiciary of Pakistan who issued decisions fearlessly. It is said that a new era of the judiciary will begin on March 8 in Punjab when Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan will take oath of office.

**Journalist Imran Riaz sent to jail**

PTI demands his immediate release

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: A Lahore district court on Friday sent anchorperson Imran Riaz, who was arrested last night, to jail in a corruption case. Riaz was arrested late last night from his home, with visuals of the arrest going viral on social media. PTI has decried the arrest and called for Riaz's immediate release. Riaz was presented before Judicial Magistrate Imran Abid by ACE.

**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

**Ali Zafar also reluctant**

## Gohar 'removed' as PTI chairman, claims Marwat

Sher Afzal Marwat said that the party has moved the Supreme Court against rigging in the February 8 general elections

KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Sher Afzal Marwat Friday claimed that Barrister Gohar Ali Khan was "removed" as the chairman of the former ruling party over "unsatisfactory" performance. His remarks came a day after Gohar announced that the PTI's next chairman nominee is Barrister Ali Zafar. The party's internal elections are scheduled to take place on March 3. The former ruling party's top post had been lying vacant for more than a month after not only the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), but the Supreme Court also declared its intra-party elections unlawful and stripped the party of its iconic bat symbol. Therefore, Gohar, who became the chairman as a result of those elections, was not the party head anymore. But as the party is set to hold its next elections, it has chosen someone else other than him. Talking to a private

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**ECP notifies victory of PML-N candidates from Islamabad**

Anjum, Tariq Fazal, Raja Khurram had emerged victorious from Islamabad's NA seats

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: In a blow to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Friday notified the victories of three Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidates who emerged victorious from Islamabad's three constituencies. Three PML-N candidates - Anjum Aqeel, Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, and Raja Khurram Nawaz - had won from NA-46, NA-47 and NA-48 respectively.

Continued on Page 06

**Charles' secret succession planning unveiled**

Revelation comes in the wake of Buckingham Palace's announcement on February 5

CENTRELINE REPORT

LONDON: As King Charles grapples with his battle against cancer, reports unveil a clandestine mission underway within the walls of Buckingham Palace. The Monarch, amidst his treatment, is said to be meticulously crafting the future of the British Monarchy, with Prince William at the forefront of his highly secretive succession planning.

Continued on Page 06

## Pak warns of consequences of unlawful Israeli occupation

Israeli settlement policy making ending its prolonged occupation more difficult, Pakistan tells UN court

DNA

THE HAGUE: Pakistan on Friday said that Israel's occupation of Palestine is unlawful and that it must stop. Addressing the International Court of Justice, Law Minister Ahmed Irfan Aslam said that Pakistan has been led to "the conclusion that Israel's occupation is unlawful and unlawfulness must have consequences." For the first time since its establishment in 1948, Israel is currently being tried before the International Court of Justice, the highest judicial body in the UN, on charges of committing the crime of "genocide" against Palestinians in Gaza. Criticising the Israeli settler policy, Aslam said that through this policy Tel Aviv creates irreversible facts on the ground which make it difficult to bring an end to its prolonged occupation. "Its policies and practices of occupation deny the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and amount to systematic racial discrimination and serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights," he said, urging the UN top court to take this seriously. He said that Israel's ongoing actions are against international law and seek to acquire Palestinian territory while killing and displacing its people.

Continued on Page 06

**Hamas calls for holding Israel accountable**

UN agency for Palestinian refugees at 'breaking point': chief

DNA

GAZA: Hamas Movement called on Friday for holding Israel accountable over its horrific crimes against children and civilians in the Gaza Strip. In a statement, Hamas urged human rights institutions around the world to record the Israeli occupation army's ongoing crimes of horrific killing of children and defenseless civilians, which are committed with a green light from the US administration. Hamas stressed that "continuing the Nazi Zionist enemy's criminal bombing of civilians' homes in the Gaza Strip is an expansion of its war of genocide and ethnic cleansing," referring to the barbaric bombing that

Continued on Page 06

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## Mayor Karachi ensures proper arrangements for Shab-e-Barat

KARACHI: Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab Friday directed concerned officers that citizens should not have any difficulty in visiting graveyards to offer Fateha at the graves of their relatives on the occasion of the holy night Shab-e-Barat. He said this on the occasion of an emergency visit to the city along with the Municipal Commissioner KMC S.M Afzal Zaidi and others. He said that cleaning, lighting, and water should be provided inside the cemeteries and in the outer part of the graveyards. There should be no sewerage or filth inside the graveyards and all the municipal staff should be present in the cemeteries on Shab-e-Barat, he said. Barrister Murtaza Wahab during this visit went to Essa Nagri graveyard in East District, Sakhi Hasan Graveyard in Central District, and Muhammad Shah Graveyard in North Karachi and reviewed the arrangements being made for Shab-e-Barat.

## PAC organized painting competition, 2024

RAWALPINDI, Feb 23 (APP): Punjab Arts Council (PAC) on Friday organized the first Punjab painting competition 2024 at the Government Post Graduate College Attock. According to PAC spokesman, dozens of candidates from 16 to 35 years of age participated in the competition while the topics including early marriage, small family, prosperous Pakistan, poverty in Pakistan, civilization and culture of Punjab and natural beauty of Pakistan were kept in the district-level painting competitions. Sara Hafeez, Umm Salma and Saleha Tariq won the first, second and third positions respectively in the painting competitions. Deputy Commissioner Attock, Rao Atif Raza was the chief guest of the prize distribution ceremony. Director Arts Council Waqar Ahmad, former Principal Government Post Graduate College Professor Majid Bhatti, Deputy Director Colleges were also present with him on this occasion. —APP

## BISP launches annual reports for FY 2022-23

ISLAMABAD: The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has launched its Annual Reports for the fiscal year 2022-23, highlighting the progress and achievements in key initiatives such as the National Socio-Economic Registry, BISP Taleemi Wazaif, and BISP Nashonuma. Speaking on the occasion, Secretary of BISP, Amer Ali Ahmed expressed his gratitude to the officials for their continued support and collaboration. He emphasized BISP's commitment to transparency and its primary focus on providing additional support to the most deserving families across the country, said a news release. The Secretary BISP informed the development partners that the financial support to 9.3 Million households has been increased to Rs.10500 quarterly.—DNA

# COMSTECH announces 85 fellowships for Yemen

Prof. Choudhary informed that COMSTECH and the University of Lahore has also jointly offered 25 full degree programs from BS to PhD to the Yemeni citizens.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary in collaboration with CCoE institutions and the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen in Islamabad has announced second phase of COMSTECH-CCoE Yemen program at the COMSTECH secretariat on Friday. Prof. Choudhary announced 85 fellowships for Yemeni scholars generously offered by the CCoE member institutions and COMSTECH. He informed that the "COMSTECH-CCoE Yemen Program" for capacity building of Yemeni scientists was announced in June 2022. Prof. Choudhary appreciated the efforts of H. E. Mohammed Motahar Alashabi, the Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen as highly commendable in launching and facilitating this program. He extended his gratitude to the CCoE institutions for their generous offering of these fellowships. Prof. Choudhary informed that COMSTECH



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Yemen speaking on the occasion of fellowship award program. —Photo Mudassar Raja

and the University of Lahore has also jointly offered 25 full degree programs from BS to PhD to the Yemeni citizens. Prof. Choudhary informed that the University of Lahore, Health Services Academy, International Center for Chemical and Biolog-

ical Sciences, University of Management and Technology Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam, University of Sargodha, Superior University, and National Agriculture Research Center has generously offered fellowships in the 2nd phase to Yemeni scholars in

the fields of Medicinal Chemistry, Health, Agriculture, and Climate. The launching ceremony was attended by the Rector, University of Lahore, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ashraf, Rector, University of Management and Technology, Dr. Asif Raza, Vice

Chancellor, Health Services Academy, Prof. Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan, Chairman PARC, Dr. Ghulam Muhammad Ali and Director General NARC Dr. Shahzad Asad and the representatives of Superior University, and University of Sargodha.

## ICU, EOC agree to jointly work for polio eradication

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamia College University (ICU) Peshawar on Friday agreed to jointly fight for the elimination of poliovirus from the province and to save children from permanent disability due to this disease. In this regard, a delegation of EOC under the leadership of Special Secretary Health for Polio Prevention and Coordinator EOC Abdul Basit met Vice Chancellor Islamia College University

Professor Dr. Gul Majid Khan. The meeting was attended by Deputy Coordinator EOC Mohammad Zeeshan Khan, Team Leader of World Health Organization (WHO) Provincial Dr Sarfaraz Faridi, Media Officer of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Shadab Younis and SBC Officer Yasir Farrukh and other officials of EOC also participated in the meeting. Special Secretary Health Abdul Basit while expressing his views said that apart from Pakistan and Afghanistan, polio has been completely eradicated from other countries of the world. He said that there

are various misconceptions about the polio vaccine in our society which need to be addressed by creating awareness in society. Mentioning the important role of students in removing the misunderstandings about the polio vaccine in society, Abdul Baast said that students can play an important role in creating awareness about the prevention of polio and other diseases in society. He said that EOC has planned to keep the students of Islamia College University engaged in various activities to create awareness in society about health, especially polio vaccination. Vice-Chancellor Islamia Col-

lege University Professor Dr. Gul Majid Khan appreciated the ongoing efforts of EOC to eradicate polio and assured all possible support from the university to eradicate this disease. On this occasion, various suggestions were made to remove the misunderstandings about the polio vaccine in society and to highlight the importance of the polio vaccine to ensure the eradication of polio. In the meeting, it was agreed that a formal memorandum would be finalized to implement cooperation between the two organizations for the eradication of polio.



NAROWAL: President Dr Arif Alvi and Begum Samina Alvi visiting the Kartarpur Corridor, in Narowal.—DNA

## ISSI roundtable: SCO Pakistan policy priorities, opportunities

DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood underscored the significance of SCO as a transregional platform.

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) hosted a Roundtable, entitled "Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Pakistan's Policy, Priorities and Opportunities." Ambassador (R) Babar Amin, Pakistan's first-ever National Coordinator for SCO, delivered a keynote address. Eminent discussants from academia and think-tanks presented their perspectives. The Roundtable provided valuable insights into Pakistan's upcoming pivotal role in the SCO in the run-up to Council of Heads of Government (CHG) summit to be hosted by Pakistan as well as its vision for regional

cooperation and economic integration. In his welcome remarks, DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood underscored the significance of SCO as a trans-regional platform. He highlighted the importance of SCO in contemporary global milieu, opportunities for Pakistan as the country prepares to take a leading role in the Organization, and the challenges that should be kept in view regarding SCO's objectives and role in future. He highlighted that since its establishment in 2001, SCO has grown to become a 'big family' of 26 countries, including member states, observers and dialogue partners. He added that, commutatively, SCO accounts for 60% Eurasian landmass 40% of global population, and nearly 30%

of global GDP. The Organization continues to carry the "Shanghai Spirit" of mutual trust, equality, respect for diversity and pursuit of common development, as opposed to any zero-sum perspectives or notions of geopolitical confrontation or civilizational clash. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood further emphasized that Pakistan has considered SCO as an important platform from the outset and the country's forthcoming responsibilities in various Councils as well as the apex decision-making body, the Council of Heads of State, entails important opportunities for advancing SCO's objectives of regional peace and stability. It would be important for Pakistan to be both imaginative and proactive as its steers the various SCO meetings and

Summit processes in 2024 and beyond. He concluded by highlighting the challenges that may confront the Organization in the form of diversity of member states, effects of major-power competition, and changing nature of security threats in the region, and called for careful resolution of such challenges with close consultations among the member countries. Ambassador Babar Amin, in his keynote address, outlined Pakistan's strategic objectives within the Organization. He highlighted Pakistan's efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with Russia through the SCO platform and emphasized the importance of connectivity and infrastructure development, particularly in addressing energy crises. He noted that Pakistan can act as a

natural partner with SCO for promoting connectivity, trade and economic cooperation in the region. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) aligns naturally with goals of SCO for regional connectivity and promotion of trade. Pakistan can also assist SCO member countries in the area of security cooperation due to its extensive counter-terrorism experience and collaboration with the RATS (Regional Anti Terrorism Structure) mechanism of SCO. Ambassador Babar Amin added that by actively participating in SCO meetings and initiatives, Pakistan aims to strengthen its historical ties with Central Asia and further solidify its comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with China, he added.

## PML-N respects opposition: Azma Bukhari

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader Azma Bukhari has said the PML-N respected the opposition and wanted to take them along. Talking to the media outside the Punjab Assembly on Friday, she urged the PTI backed candidates to follow rule of business. She said: "If the PTI backed candidates think that they will halt affairs of the house through negative tactics then it is their misunderstanding." Azma Bukhari said the PML-N was present in the house with its allies with a strength of two-third majority. She said people of Punjab wanted relief and solution to their problems as they had no interest in politics of hue and cry. The PML-N in Punjab would set new development era under the leadership of Maryam Nawaz, she said and added that with the grace of Allah, The Almighty, people would see progressive in Punjab.—APP

## PDMA alerts admin for rains, winds, snowfall in upper KP

PESHAWAR: Another series of rains, strong winds and snowfall in upper districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is likely to start from February 25, an official of the Meteorological Department said here Friday. In this connection, Provincial Disasters Management Authority (PDMA), has issued a message to all district administrations to be alert. In view of the rains and snowfall, the district administration has been instructed to take precautionary measures. DG, PDMA Muhammad Qaiser Khan said here. Landslides in upper districts due to snowfall and rains and directives have been issued to district administration to ensure availability of small and heavy machinery, DG PDMA told media men. He said in the event of a storm, people should stay away from power lines, dilapidated buildings and structures, sign boards and billboards. Tourists and local population in sensitive upper areas are instructed to be aware of weather conditions and take precautionary measures, he added. He further said, in sensitive districts, messages to the district administration should be conveyed to the local population in local languages. In any emergency situation, all concerned organizations should be alert in the maintenance of road links and in case of road closure, alternative routes should be provided for traffic.—DNA

## CDA rapidly improving water supply amid shortage

ISLAMABAD: The water supply department of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) is rapidly working on several projects to meet the shortage of water in the city. In this context, the maintenance of various old water networks and the replacement of rotten pipelines are also going on rapidly on the part of the water supply, so that the citizens can continue to have uninterrupted water supply. Because there is a significant decrease in the existing water reserves despite the lack of required rains throughout the year. In this regard, the Simli Water Filtration Plant will be closed for 24 hours from Saturday, February 24 to Sunday, February 25 in connection with the necessary repairs of the Simli Water Filtration Plant and in case of changing the main condition line. As a result of which there was water shortage in different sectors of Islamabad F-7, F-6, F-8, G-6, G-7/2, G-8/2, G-9/3 and G-9/4 water supply will be suspended. After which water supply will be restored in the above sectors as per the schedule. On this occasion, the water supply department of CDA has also appealed to the residents of the above sectors to be careful in using water and ensure the stock of water in their homes so that in case of non-availability of water, they have to not face any kind of problem. Moreover, water tanker service has also been alerted by the water supply department in view of the current situation. Considering the situation of the citizens, helpline number 9202218 has also been issued by the Water Supply Wing. Similarly, citizens can register their complaints on WhatsApp number 0335775444. It should be noted that timely redressal of received complaints will be ensured in all circumstances. Apart from this, timely redressal of complaints like leakage in pipelines is also being ensured by the Water Supply Wing and strict action is also being taken against those who waste water so that water reserves can be made as safe as possible.—DNA

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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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Fire Services Rawalpindi/  
Islamabad.....1122 & 16  
& Rescue Services.4451122  
Motorway Police.....9266044  
Motorway Police.9270601-20  
Women Police Stations  
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Railway Exchange 9270831-5  
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489  
CAA.....9281092



## Hospitals

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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



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CDA.....9208301-04  
Met Office.....9250360-6  
RDA.....5555864  
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## Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

## APNS Secretary General Sarmad Ali says

# Media cooperation vital in fostering communication

### Int'l Conference on 'Role of Media in Enhancing the Global Connectivity through BRI' held

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Speakers at a one-day international conference on "Role of Media in Enhancing Global Connectivity through the Belt and Road Initiative" held here explored the impact of media on increasing global awareness about the current challenges and paving the way for more interconnected and mutually beneficial relationships for future generations. The conference was jointly organized by China Media Group (Islamabad Studio), Department of Arts and Media, Foundation University, Islamabad (FUI), and the Pakistan Research Centre for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF), Islamabad, on Thursday. The conference was aimed at learning about the

core values of Chinese journalism, exploring their impact on reporting standards and public discourse, and exploring the proactive role of Chinese media in promoting Chinese culture to increase global awareness and understanding of the complex nuances of Chinese cultures. Chinese media actively emphasizes how the BRI promotes trade, attracts investment, and expands the markets of participating countries. Bureau Chief, China Media Group (Islamabad Studio), Islamabad Office, Ms. Jianing Du, presented a speech on "China-Pakistan Media Cooperation to Support the Development of the CPEC: Taking the CMG's Communication Practice in Pakistan." Former Federal Secretary of Information, Mr. Ashfaq Gondal, presented a

speech on analyzing the geopolitical impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on the participating countries and the broader international community. Earlier in his opening remarks, Rector/Pro-Rector Foundation University, Islamabad, Brig. (R) Dr. Abdul Ghafoor, highlighted the role of Chinese media in promoting positivity, maturity, and constructive reality. He highlighted the establishment of a regional media connectivity center to conduct various joint projects, including conferences, training, and exchange learning programs, to achieve shared aspirations. Head Department of Arts and Media, FUI, Dr. Hina Shahid, in her speech on the role of media in constructing reality, discussed the role of the media in framing reality. She noted, "It's crucial to acknowledge that the

media's role in constructing reality is not inherently negative." She highlighted, "Chinese media plays a crucial role in generating public support and enthusiasm for the Road and Belt initiative projects by increasing awareness and disseminating correct information." Secretary General of the All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS), Sarmad Ali, presented a speech on "Conceptualizing the Belt and Road Initiatives through the Pakistani Lens." He noted, "Media cooperation plays a vital role in fostering communication and coordination, which is significant for promoting a positive image of China and global development cooperation." "As we strengthen bonds of friendship and cooperation between the peoples of Pakistan and China, media cooper-

ation has the potential to pave the way for a more interconnected and mutually beneficial relationship for generations to come," SG said. Chairman, Implementation Tribunal for Newspaper Employees (ITNE), Shahid Mehmood Khokhar, Chairman, Board of Experts, PRCCSF, and Ovais Ali Khokhar, Head of the Social Sciences Department, Bahria University, Islamabad, Dr. Adam Saud, also spoke on the occasion. On the sidelines of the conference, a poster exhibition titled "Belt & Road Initiative: A Journey towards a Prospective Future" was held, which was very successful.

The winners were announced for the top ten participants who skillfully portrayed the theme and showcased their stories with remarkable results.



ISLAMABAD: Defence Attache of Romania and his wife take interest in various pieces of floral arrangements on the occasion of the Japanese reception. —DNA

## Shahbaz Sharif should form a broad-based govt

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 Mian Shahbaz Sharif should form a broad-based government after consultations. After forming the government, the PM should direct immediate negotiation for a new loan from the IMF to save the country from bankruptcy, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that various international and local institutions and experts are sounding the alarm about Pakistan, while some unsuccessful and frustrated political elements within the country are also engaged in efforts to damage the country, which is condemnable. Speaking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that the burden of local and foreign debt on Pakistan is continuously increasing. The only short-term way to pay these debts is by taking new loans to repay old ones.

Borrowing has become necessary as domestic production, exports, remittances, and investment etc. cannot solve the problem of a shortage of funds. Mian Zahid Hussain said that it is important for Pakistan to remain under the supervision of the IMF due to increasing debts, but the results of this will be more inflation, unemployment, a decline in public services, and cuts in development projects. He said that the economic situation has made the lives of people difficult, while another IMF deal will add to the miseries of the masses. The business leader said that in this critical situation, there has not been a notable reduction in government expenditure that was expected, nor has there been a significant increase in revenue. There has been no progress towards direct taxes, efforts to reduce the budget deficit, or the negative effects of the current situation on the people. He informed that presently Pakistan's external debt has reached 124.6 billion dollars, and since 2011, domestic debt has increased six times to 146.4 billion dollars.—DNA

## Incoming Government to focus on promoting ease of doing business

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, newly elected Member National Assembly of PML-N and former Chairperson, NA Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue said that the incoming government would focus on promoting ease of doing business to facilitate the better growth of business and investment activities in the country. He said this while talking to the business community during his visit to the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh said that the new government would make business and economic policies in consultation with the business community to promote a

conducive business environment and support them in business promotion. He said that the new government would try to bring further reforms in FBR to broaden the tax net and improve tax culture. He said that addressing the key issues of the business community would be a key focus of the new government to enhance its role in the economic development of the country. He assured that he would cooperate with the business community in addressing their concerns and facilitating them in business development. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that Pakistan needs to promote trade and exports to revive its economy and stressed

that the new government should extend maximum facilitation to the private sectors in realizing the actual export potential of the country. He said that the loss-making commercial state-owned entities are a huge burden on the national exchequer and stressed that the new government should expedite their privatization to reduce their losses and improve their performance. He said that Pakistan has huge potential to promote regional trade and the incoming government should work for regional trade promotion to achieve beneficial results for its economy. He assured that the business community would fully cooperate with the new government in promoting the business and economic interests of the country. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice

President ICCI said that the new government should focus on promoting industrialization to create new jobs and improve exports. For this purpose, more industrial zones should be established across the country that would attract investment to the country. Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that the new government should withdraw tax on immovable property under Section 7E as it has badly affected the business activities in the real estate sector, which is harmful to the economy. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that the new government should focus on establishing direct air links of Pakistan with major export markets to improve its exports. He said that PIA should be privat-

ized to turnaround it from huge losses.

## Citizens urged not to allow children to fly kites; 81 held

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi District Police have urged the citizens to ensure that their children do not violate the ban on kite flying imposed by the provincial government otherwise strict action would be taken against the violators in accordance with the law. According to a police spokesman, Rawalpindi police managed to arrest 81 kite flying ban violators on Thursday night and recovered over 4400 kites, 104 string rolls, sound systems, weapons and other items. He informed that over 500 accused were arrested and more than 58,000 kites and around 1000 string rolls were recovered. The spokesman said that on the special

directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani, police were taking strict action in accordance with the law. The CPO had requested the parents to stop their children from getting involved in such activities as a crackdown against kite flyers had already been accelerated in the city, he added. Special squads had been formed to net the violators while deputy superintendents of police and station house officers were also taking part in the operation. He said that the officers concerned had been directed to utilise all available resources to control the kite flying and to net the ban violators and the kite sellers. The viola-

tors were being dealt with an iron hand and no one would be allowed to violate the law and indulge in kite flying and selling, he added. The use of metal string for kite flying results in the loss of human lives therefore, all-out efforts are made to stop kite flying, he said adding, that a special awareness campaign is also being run to control the ban violation. He said that the Inspector General of Police had issued orders to speed up the crackdown against kite flying and aerial firing. He said Rawalpindi district police had adopted a zero-tolerance policy against kite sellers, flyers, aerial firing and strict action was being taken against the violators. The people had

also been requested to report on 15 against kite flying and aerial firing so that such notorious elements could be immediately rounded up, he added. More than 1500 police officials were deployed to thwart any plans for Basant on Thursday night and Friday. Drone operators were being used to monitor kite-flying, he said. The parents, teachers, scholars and civil society were also taken into confidence to play their role in preventing the celebration of Basant. The Rawalpindi police had also launched an awareness campaign about the hazards of the risky sport with the help of religious scholars, who were asked to make announcements on their respective mosques' sound systems about the demerits of kite-flying. The police had finalized arrangements for live monitoring of all densely populated areas, while all Station House Officers (SHOs) had been directed to ensure strict surveillance of kite sellers in their areas.—DNA

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## Briefs

## Irfan Siddiqui criticizes PTI

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfan Siddiqui criticized Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's statement on Friday for approaching the International Monetary Fund (IMF) not to support Pakistan, in a desperate attempt for political gains. Speaking in the Senate, he expressed concern that such a demand from a political party could negatively impact the country's interests. He called upon the House to debate whether preventing financial institutions by political parties from supporting Pakistan would be beneficial or detrimental to the country.

## Thirteen reports presented in Senate

ISLAMABAD: Thirteen reports from various Standing Committees were presented in the Senate on Friday. These reports covered a range of bills and subjects including, report on the Bill to provide for the maintenance, administration, and regulation of Toshakhana [The Toshakhana (Maintenance, Administration, and Regulation) Bill], report on the Bill further to amend the Civil Servants Act, 1973 [The Civil Servants (Amendment) Bill, 2023], report on the Bill further to amend the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002 [The Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2023], report on the Bill further to amend the Pakistan Names and Emblems (Prevention of Unauthorized Use) Act, 1957 [The Pakistan Names and Emblems (Prevention of Unauthorized Use) (Amendment) Bill, 2023], report on the Bill further to amend the State-Owned Enterprises (Governance and Operations) Act, 2023 [The State-Owned Enterprises (Governance and Operations) (Amendment) Bill, 2023], report on the Bill further to amend the Banking Companies Ordinance, 1962 [The Banking Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2023], report on the Bill further to amend the Pakistan Council for Science and Technology Act, 2017 [The Pakistan Council for Science and Technology (Amendment) Bill, 2023], report on the subject matter of Starred Question No.52 regarding the deplorable condition of the Government housing colony in Sector G-8, Islamabad, report on the subject matter of Starred Question No.3 regarding the Rates of LPG, report on a point of public importance raised regarding increasing smog in various cities of Punjab, report on a Privilege Motion moved against the Neo News TV Channel on airing a fake, false, and malicious news report against the Senators, report on a Bill further to amend the Smart Institute of Sciences and Technology Act, 2022 [The Smart Institute of Sciences and Technology (Amendment) Bill, 2023] and report on a Bill to provide for the establishment of the Federal Institute of Management Sciences [The Federal Institute of Management Sciences Bill, 2023].—APP

## CPO orders crackdown against kite flyers

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi district police have accelerated their ongoing crackdown against kite flyers and sellers and managed to net over 69 kite flying ban violators on Thursday night on recovery 3700 kites, 70 string rolls, said a police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi had directed police officers to accelerate crackdown against kite flyers and sellers. Rawalpindi district police had arrested over 450 kite flyers and sellers during this season and recovered over 56,000 kites, over 900 kite flying string rolls, weapons, sound systems, liquor and other items from their possession, he said.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Children presenting a martial art show on the occasion of Japanese emperor's birthday celebrations.—DNA

## Dysfunctional power sector is bankrupting the country

He noted that the private sector is trying to install more and more power plants with the help of politicians, which is very damaging to the country

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Murtaza Mughal, President of Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW), says the maladjusted power sector is bankrupting both the public and the productive sectors. In March, consumers will end up paying an additional Rs7 per unit on top of the standard cost, which will be another serious blow for them, he said. He said that investors and consumers in the solar sector are being discouraged steadily to benefit IPPs, which should be stopped. Dr. Murtaza Mughal said in a statement issued here today that earlier, electricity bills used to decrease in the winter, but now they are continuously increasing in this season as well. Now, preparations are being made to charge consumers an additional seven rupees

and thirteen paise per unit in the month of March in the name of a fuel cost adjustment (FCA). This increase will be imposed on the masses against electricity consumed during the month of January. The rising cost of insurance due to Houthi raids in the Red Sea is one of the reasons given for the higher FCA. Higher diesel and petrol prices are also cited as contributing factors, but policymakers should consider that it is becoming intolerable for consumers. The main problem is that almost all consumers cannot afford the high cost of electricity, but instead of reducing theft, corruption, mismanagement, and incompetence in the power sector, the policy of continuously increasing electricity rates is being followed, which is having a very negative impact on the masses and the economy. He said that people are being charged more than

they can afford, which is an injustice. On the other hand, the policy of discouraging investors and users of solar energy is also going on vigorously, he observed. Investors and the public have invested billions of rupees in this sector, for which they are being punished, which is deteriorating the investment environment. Dr. Mughal said that net metering was provided to solar consumers so that they could sell surplus power to the government. Now the profits of these consumers are being continuously reduced to push people back to expensive electricity instead of solar energy. Such a radical change in government policies scares investors and makes them reluctant to invest in Pakistan. Due to such measures, investment in the country has remained negligible. Dr. Mughal said that the disastrous effects of IPPs

have caused irreparable damage to the country's economy, but despite this, the influential people in every government are supporting IPPs to reap benefits. The problem is that succeeding administrations have failed to implement crucial structural reforms. Furthermore, a great deal of new IPPs are being started without consideration for the macroeconomic realities of the nation. He noted that the private sector is trying to install more and more power plants with the help of politicians, which is very damaging to the country. The continuous increase in the price of electricity leads to an increase in theft and a decrease in its use, and people start choosing other ways, which leads to problems in capacity payments to IPPs, but no government is ready to initiate reform in this regard, he observed.

## IESSI leads ground breaking health initiative

ISLAMABAD: On the International Day of Social Justice, IESSI spearheaded a significant initiative in collaboration with ILO Pakistan and the Labour Department ICT under which a free medical camp was setup by Commissioner IESSI. The event boasted esteemed attendees, including Mr. Geir Thomas Tunstall, Country Head of ILO, the DG Chief Commissioner Office, Commissioner IESSI, and the Director of Labour & Industries, who collectively graced the occasion as chief guests. The ICT spokesman Dr. Abdullah Tabasum on Friday said that the medical camp, held in the brick kiln community of Islamabad, witnessed active participation from Commissioner IESSI, Director (Labour), Development and Finance.—APP

## CPEC projects underway in Pak to help local economy

ISLAMABAD: A number of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects are making renewed progress as the CPEC, a flagship project under the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), enters its next phase, helping the country to alleviate energy shortages and empowering its economic growth. Entering 2024, CPEC projects have achieved new progress," the Global Times reported. "The Karot hydropower project, a 720 megawatt (MW) hydropower plant developed on the Jhelum River in Pakistan and the first ever large-scale hydropower project under the BRI, has generated a total of 3.1 billion kilowatt hours of electricity in 2023," China Three Gorges Corporation, which invested in and is leading construction of the project, announced on its website. In December, two China-donated projects, including a seawater desalination plant and the upgrade of the Pak-China Friendship Hospital, were inaugurated in the Gwadar district of southwestern Balochistan province. The desalination plant will provide 5,000 tons per day of potable water to help address a severe drinking water shortage, while the Pak-China Friendship Hospital has boosted its capacity to 150 beds from the original 50. "At the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant, the K2 and K3 units that both use Hualong One, China's third-generation nuclear power reactor with full intellectual property rights, are churning out a combined 20 billion kilowatt hours each year, satisfying the production and residential electricity use of two million people while saving energy equivalent to 6.24 million tons of standard coal," the Global Times learned from China National Nuclear Corporation. In July last year, Unit 5 (C-5) of the Chash-

ma Nuclear Power Plant broke ground, marking the 7th nuclear reactor exported from China to Pakistan. "Pakistan is on the right side of history by standing with China as the game changer. CPEC's second phase will unveil record development and economic uplift in the country," said Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Defense. Launched in 2013, the CPEC is a corridor linking Gwadar port with Kashi in Northwest China's Xinjiang region, highlighting energy, transportation, and industrial cooperation. In its first phase, the CPEC added more than 8,000 MW of power-generating capacity to the Pakistani national grid. More than 800 kilometers of highways were built, while more than 800 kilometers of fiber-optic cable were laid. More than 200,000 jobs were created, according to data from the Pakistani Embassy in China. To jointly promote the development of the CPEC, China and Pakistan held the Fourth Meeting of the CPEC Joint Working Group on International Cooperation and Coordination in Islamabad in late January. "The next phase of CPEC will be advanced in a multi-prong fashion, with progress in connectivity, industrialization, and agriculture," Pakistani Ambassador to China Khalil Hashmi told the Global Times in a recent interview. "Projects including the optimization of the ML-1 (Mainline-1) railway project and the realignment of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) are expected to see concrete progress," the envoy said. Present at the joint working group meeting, Hashmi revealed, "Both sides expressed satisfaction at the pace of progress that is being achieved on CPEC as a whole.—APP

## Pak Cotton Yarn Exports to China Surged by 46.7% in 2023

DNA

ISLAMABAD: China's import of cotton yarn from Pakistan reached a record high of \$695,622,837, marking a significant surge of 46.7% during the year 2023, data from China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textile and Apparel (CCCT) showed, according to China Economic Net (CEN). Recently, the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) released a report stating that due to the sharp rise in energy prices, power and gas supply interruptions, more than a thousand textile factories have stopped production, and the decline in production capacity has affected the demand for intermediates. As per CCCT, due to the large price difference between domestic and foreign cotton yarns after the second quarter, the importers' order intentions continued to rise, resulting in the recent arrival of imported yarns, which pushed up the imports.

## ANF recovers 331 kg drugs in 10 operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan while conducting 10 operations across the country managed to recover over 331 kg of drugs and arrested 11 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 10.5 kg heroin was recovered from a parcel being sent to the UK at Cargo Office Islamabad while an accused was also arrested. In another operation, 2.5 kg of Ice was recovered from a parcel being sent to Sri Lanka at the Lahore Courier Office. 68 Ice-filled capsules were recovered from a passenger going to Qatar at Islamabad Airport. 1.8 kg hashish was recovered from a Doha-bound passenger, arrested at Peshawar Airport. 330 grams of cocaine was recovered from a parcel sent from Nigeria at Lahore Airport. 255 kg opium was recovered from the Galikanak Mustang area and 29 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested from M-1 Motorway Islamabad. In the 8th operation, 22 kg of hashish was recovered near the Lakpas Toll Plaza Mustang area and an accused was arrested during the operation. Seven kg of hashish was recovered from two suspects rounded up near Sher Shah Toll Plaza Multan. In the 10th operation, one kg of hashish was recovered from three suspects held near Mohalla Usmania Gilgit.—DNA

## All possible facilities to be ensured for Hujjaj

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed Friday said that all possible facilities will be provided to Pakistani pilgrims during this year's hajj where special training programs were also being conducted at the district level through camps managed by the religious affairs ministry.

In an exclusive interview with PTV news channel, he said that under the supervision of the Pakistan Hajj mission special catering companies were being arranged to feed pilgrims under a government scheme and will ensure quality and safety standards at every step. Minister said that

this year Pakistan Hajj mission is offering simplified transportation services to Pakistani pilgrims with standard buses ensuring round-the-clock, adding that, the transport department will fully dedicate themselves to the sacred duty. A comprehensive transportation guidelines had also been issued at each building, he added. The caretaker government had introduced several new services for the pilgrims to help them perform the rituals with comfort and ease, he mentioned. Monitoring Cell has been put in place to closely monitor and address any potential issues of the private Pilgrims, he said, adding, furthermore,

various other specialized units, such as a Wheelchair Desk have been established to cater to the specific needs of different groups of pilgrims. Replying to a question, he said in a bid to improve the Hajj pilgrimage experience for travelers in 2024, the federal government has also unveiled a comprehensive update to the Hajj package, adding that, first time in history government has introduced a shorter 20 to 25-day Hajj program in which we will provide pilgrims with a more concise and efficient experience. This change is expected to make the pilgrimage more accessible to a broader range of people, he added. Every pilgrim

will also receive a specially designed bag featuring the Pakistani flag, a QR code for easy identification, and relevant information, he mentioned. In a move toward greater administrative efficiency, the government had launched a dedicated mobile app for online registration of Hajj applications, he said, adding, this app is streamlining the administrative aspects of the pilgrimage, making it easier for pilgrims to apply and manage their journey. To another question, Aneeq said that every pilgrim will be given a mobile SIM of a Saudi company for free which will have 180 minutes for international calls.—APP



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## Pakistan struggle for transparency, trust

IN the annals of Pakistan's political saga, this election emerged as a defining event. Despite all the challenges, the electorate managed to defy all odds and turned out in unprecedented numbers, tearing through the barriers of fear in pursuit of change through the ballot. Yet, their resounding and decisive voices are being drowned out once again. This remarkable turnout was a resounding protest against the attempted political oppression and the archaic status quo, reflecting the evident anti-establishment sentiment within the country. The question should not be whether this election was truly free or fair. The persistent perception of unfairness has marred Pakistan's electoral landscape for years, and the 12th general election on February 8 only added to the existing skepticism. Questions should be raised about the integrity of the institutions of Pakistan. After Prime Minister Khan's third conviction in less than a week, resulting in an unbelievable sentence exceeding 30 years in prison, the murky machinations of the security establishment were exposed, casting a dark cloud over the legitimacy of the electoral process. This latest conviction has brought disgrace upon the nation and laid bare the mockery of justice. The impartiality of the ECP as the guardian angel of free elections is now under intense scrutiny. The biased actions against a specific party directly undermine the assurances of the caretaker administration and the Election Commission of Pakistan regarding a level playing field and fair polls. What was meant to be a clear path of victory for the PML-N turned into a wave of popular dissent against the state. While allegations of rigging and election day anomalies are not novel in Pakistan, the manipulation of election results undermines the country's power structures and has effectively led to growing public distrust in the system. The loss of faith in the state by the nation emerges as the most formidable challenge stemming from this election. There are always genuine security concerns that loom large in the country, particularly as the general elections approach. This year, it was radical militants and Baloch insurgents intensifying their attacks in an attempt to disrupt and discredit the democratic process. Between February 1 and 9, there were 36 out of 63 reported terrorist attacks directly linked to election violence. The military elite has often struggled with legitimacy crises, often seeking refuge behind a civilian facade. However, history has proved that despite numerous attempts at political engineering, the people have consistently asserted their own will. The establishment often forgets that such persistent meddling in political affairs inevitably yields undesirable consequences. Is this orchestrated chaos a misguided attempt at crisis management, as the establishment loses its grip over the international narrative? Daily revelations from various quarters, including disillusioned civil servants, hint at internal friction, if not outright breakdown. There is mass hysteria within the country, and while the media bear some responsibility for it, they are not solely culpable. Decades of political engineering have created a system teetering under the weight of distortions and mutations, now imploding before our eyes.

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## 2-year of Russia-Ukraine conflict

FEBRUARY 24 marks the two-year anniversary of the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The US and Europe are still considering imposing additional sanctions on Russia, and the world has yet to see where the way to cease fire and stop fighting is. Just like its seemingly sudden outbreak, this conflict, the largest regional war over the past two decades, has repeatedly exceeded the expectations of the international mainstream understanding in terms of its duration, extensive involvement, severe consequences, and profound impact. Regrettably, despite two years of bloodshed, the involved parties still lack sufficient introspection. The evolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to the present day is a tragedy in international politics and a tragedy for the world as a whole. Returning to a more rational political analysis, it is difficult to say that this tragedy was unavoidable. The Ukraine crisis did not emerge overnight; it has a complex historical context and a prolonged development process. During this period, there were numerous opportunities to alleviate or even resolve the crisis, but these opportunities were missed. The situation escalated and deteriorated step by step until the conflict erupted. In summary, the root cause of the Russia-Ukraine conflict lies in the long-term imbalance of the European security structure after the Cold War, where the US and its European allies did not respect or attach importance to, let alone properly address, the legitimate security concerns of Russia, a major regional power. Several US strategic thinkers such as Henry Kissinger and John Mearsheimer had long warned American decision-makers to pay attention to this. However, driven by inherent arrogance, self-righteousness, and a selfish attitude, the US and the West promoted NATO eastward expansion without considering the unique historical and geographical sensitivities of Russia and Ukraine. This ultimately led to an uncontrollable situation. To some extent, this is a conflict where there are no winners, and everyone ends up losing. Even within the camp of the US and the West, the most conservative opinions have to admit that the sanctions against Russia have not achieved results and, in fact, have failed. According to statistics, Germany alone has incurred losses of up to 200 billion euros due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Under the pressure, Western societies are experiencing a rising sentiment of "Ukraine fatigue," public opinion is wavering, and the prospects for military support to Ukraine are uncertain. The political solution to the Ukraine crisis and the early initiation of negotiations are highly demanded by the international community. The current issue is whether the US and the West are willing to face and acknowledge it. A recent survey conducted by the Global Times Research Institute in 20 countries shows that the majority of respondents support resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict through peaceful negotiations, with support rates exceeding 60 percent in Germany, France, and the US. A survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations also shows that approximately 37 percent of the respondents believe that the war will end through negotiations, and 41 percent of respondents are willing to urge Europe to persuade Ukraine to start negotiations with Russia. This is enough to illustrate the problem.

## Seeking IMF's help; PTI's misguided move

Qamar Bashir



Critics might argue that soliciting foreign intervention in political and electoral issues could be perceived as undermining national sovereignty, potentially fueling nationalist and anti-PTI sentiment. Such a move risks politically isolating the PTI both within Pakistan and on the international stage, as it could be viewed as an excessive measure or a misuse of international institutions for domestic political conflicts. This strategy could arm opponents with grounds to accuse PTI of treason, leading to possible legal actions against its leaders, a ban on the party, and the nullification of its electoral achievements in 2024

THE decision by the former PTI chairman to petition the IMF for an electoral audit of disputed election results struck many, including myself and various opinion leaders, as a startling and misguided move. This request, especially coming from a party with a strong legal cadre, seemed out of place given the IMF's well-defined mandate. The IMF focuses on international monetary stability and economic support, dealing with financial assistance, economic stability, and growth through policy reforms. It does not involve itself in a nation's electoral matters or judicial grievances, which are sovereign issues. The appeal to the IMF for electoral scrutiny not only deviates from its established role but also risks diminishing our standing by misunderstanding the scope of international institutions. The decision by PTI's leadership to seek IMF intervention in electoral matters might reflect a profound mistrust in national institutions. This disillusionment could stem from various grievances: the establishment's overt antagonism, the Election Commission's invalidation of PTI's internal elections and subsequent stripping of its election symbol, which critically weakened the party's standing. Additionally, the overwhelming legal challenges faced by the PTI chairman, with over 200 cases lodged against him, and a perceived judicial ineffectiveness, where court orders seem disregarded and the only recourse for arrested and humiliated PTI members appears to be public disavowal of their allegiance, further exacerbate this trust deficit. The erosion of trust in the judiciary was compounded when the Supreme Court confirmed the Election Commission's decision to strip PTI of its election symbol. This sentiment deepened with a landmark ruling that invalidated Imran Khan's marriage to Bushra Bibi, a decision unprecedented in the context of Islamic jurisprudence. Successive convictions of Imran Khan in high-profile cases, such as the Cypher, Toshakhana, and the legality of his marriage, further alienated PTI supporters, especially as numerous other legal challenges loom on the horizon. The disillusionment with the country's institutions extended to the pre-election phase, where PTI faced considerable obstacles in organizing public gatherings. When these events did proceed, media coverage was often suppressed. The shift to digital campaigning saw further challenges, with internet and mobile services being disrupt-

ed or throttled. This not only targeted PTI but also impacted businesses, trade, and the broader populace, exacerbating the already compromised reputation of the nation. Some may argue that involving an international entity like the IMF could introduce transparency and impartiality into the audit process, addressing the trust deficit with domestic institutions. This approach might not only ensure fairer electoral practices but also spotlight alleged irregularities on a global stage, fostering international advocacy for democratic integrity in Pakistan. Conversely, this strategy might displease even some PTI supporters who favor internal resolution of issues, fearing it could fragment the party's unity. They contend that despite the flaws of national institutions, struggles should remain within the constitutional and legal boundaries, advocating for a domestic, democratic push for reform without foreign intervention or influence on sovereign matters. Critics argue that while such actions might not directly harm the establishment, judiciary, or government officials who would continue to receive their salaries, the real brunt of economic fallout from a halted IMF negotiation, prompted by PTI's request, would be borne by the common people. This could exacerbate unemployment and inflation, already at record highs, pushing millions more into poverty. They suggest learning from past experiences, like the repercussions of alleging foreign involvement in regime change, which cost PTI its government and led to legal troubles for its members. Instead of risking further isolation and legal action by engaging with international bodies like the IMF in domestic political disputes, they advocate for a more cautious approach that avoids giving the government and establishment reasons to target PTI and its leadership. Critics might argue that soliciting foreign intervention in political and electoral issues could be perceived as undermining national sovereignty, potentially fueling nationalist and anti-PTI sentiment. Such a move risks politically isolating the PTI both within Pakistan and on the international stage, as it could be viewed as an excessive measure or a misuse of international institutions for domestic political conflicts. This strategy could arm opponents with grounds to accuse PTI of treason, leading to possible legal actions against its leaders, a ban on the party, and the nullification of its electoral achievements in 2024.

Furthermore, there's concern that this approach could prompt a coordinated media and civil society backlash against PTI, labeling the act as unpatriotic and anti-state. Prime time TV shows might be pressured to denounce PTI's actions, while ad campaigns across traditional and social media could further condemn the party. Engagement of civil society groups to criticize PTI could lead to a significant loss of the political capital the party gained following its strong performance in the 2024 elections, especially if media outlets that had previously shifted their support towards PTI due to perceived election rigging and the treatment of its members reverse their stance. Media analysts might critique PTI for its tendency to repeat past mistakes without considering the broader implications for national sovereignty and dignity. Despite PTI's professed commitment to upholding the country's honor, its actions, perceived as impulsive, often put its narrative and principles at risk. This pattern of behavior, as observed by commentators, suggests a cycle where lessons from previous setbacks are not fully absorbed or integrated into future strategies, challenging the party's ability to maintain its narrative consistency and political credibility. Now that the arrow has been fired, and damage has been done, the PTI should adopt a comprehensive and sustained strategy to damage control. They should give positive spin to this blunder by framing PTI's decision to internationalize the issue of electoral integrity in Pakistan to the party's commitment to transparency and fair play, highlighting how this unprecedented step could pave the way for more accountable electoral processes. The narrative could focus on the need for impartial oversight in the face of domestic challenges and frame the move as a proactive approach to safeguarding democracy. This spin would portray PTI as a forward-thinking party willing to explore all avenues to ensure the sanctity of the electoral process, thus aligning its actions with global best practices for democratic governance. Open dialogue, transparency in their actions, and a unified front from leadership at all levels will be crucial in navigating criticism and reinforcing the party's commitment to strengthening Pakistan's democratic processes.   
- Former Press Secretary to the President  
Former Press Minister to the Embassy of Pakistan to France  
Former MD, SRBC

## Mind and soul

SOME spiritualists believe that the mind directs, the brain executes, the conscience watches, and the soul mirrors life. Mind, conscience, and soul are intangibles. The brain is physically quantifiable, not in its functions. This is life, part temporal and part mystic. The mind is often turned to self-deception, concocting logic for the unjustifiable, and 'blindly believing what one wanted to believe' (cognitive dissonance in psychology). The conscience, the watchdog, is lulled to sleep, and the soul is sold to the devil. Internal conflicts find catharsis in the whimsical. This state of mind is generally considered flawed; for the powerful, it is God's curse. It should concern them the most. God gives free choice to man. Every choice has a plan, a comprehensive package of consequences, evil and good, struggle and comfort, ups and downs. The entire plan is in the knowledge of God. His knowledge determines the course. His will is bound to prevail. There is no room for presumptuousness. There is no use boasting or tempting fate. It is another dimension of power dynamics. God is One and is indivisible. He does not define a particular religion, cult, or sect. He does not belong to one single group. He is for everyone and everything He has created. His domain has no bounds. There are only two groups for Him: good humans and imperfect humans. On attaining full maturity, humanity will also focus on these two broad categories without caring for the nomenclatures, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, etc. This concept is fundamental to any government, justice, and leadership system. God is only positive. His path leads to light, which means good. Satan leads humans towards darkness or evil. God's ways inculcate humility, kindness, forgiveness, patience, justice, tolerance, accommodation, and peace. Satan signifies arrogance, vendetta, anger, intolerance, stubbornness, and high-handedness. A satanic regime can never endure. For the rulers, judges, the rich, and the powerful, these are the thumb rules, provided they have some sense of history. God

eventually destroys oppressors and tyrants and buries them under heaps of shame and disgrace. 1971 has a plethora of lessons. Refuge behind unrealistic parallels is no security against end disaster. Repentance is the only course to salvation. The earlier, the better. Redemption lies in confession. It is done in solitude, facing God, admitting all the sins of transgression, arrogance, oppression, and inhumanity. Dependence on people is futile. Dependence on foreign powers is not only unwise but also shameful. We have known our leaders rushing to foreign capitals for power at home. Some met temporary success to invite disgrace eventually. Those who jettisoned their conscience out of the equation ultimately found it was becoming impossible by the day to satisfy the sadistic master entirely. The pattern has persisted over many decades, but the power-hungry monsters continue to grope in darkness, searching for avenues that do not exist. Recently, we saw another few making pilgrimages abroad without learning anything from the horrible end of their predecessors and elders. Greed brings disgrace, and blind greed brings total disgrace. Unfortunately, those enslaved by their greed have no space for shame, grace, a sense of honor, or fear of history. Ours is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The word Islamic has become redundant. The most vociferous proponents of Islam no longer adhere to it. They lie, cheat, indulge in corruption, and are ready to make a deal with the tyrant. Religion has been commercialized as 'Viagra' of politics. The not-so-religious take an oath in the full blaze of the media and, when convenient, back out without remorse. Who can fault them when the religious bigwigs go scot-free on much bigger sins? The good, godly guys suffer from traditional mediocrity. Reckless murder of morality is not only a forte of politicians. Without exception, all other segments of society equally excel in it. Remember Zia-ul-Haq, (Mard-e-Momin, Mard-e-Haq)? His promise of elections within 90 days could only materialize after his death, a mere 11 years.

An American retired general wrote that 'understanding' is an important character trait of generals. A correct appreciation of the situation in the battlefield's noise, din, and fog is astounding; understanding is also essential in every other field of life. It is founded on facts, nurtured by cold logic, flexibility, and a free mind. Its antithesis is stubbornness, glibility, and wishful thinking. The victims discover the truth when the tornado has already hit the shores, and there is nowhere to run. The perpetrators of our national tragedies had to hang their heads in shame and take the abuse that they did not even deserve. Poor Yahya Khan is an example. Understanding is a positive notion. Its mother source is also positivity. It comes from God. He does not bestow His blessings on the cruel. God loves human beings, the best of His creation. God shuts the door of wisdom on the oppressors. Understanding is a part of wisdom. The cruel are shorn of it. Thoughtfulness, meditation, and brainstorming lead to wisdom from reflection and God's consciousness. After a hectic day, a man in power who gets drunk and hits the bunk has no time for reflection. Those who confront and successfully surmount problems must get obsessed with the issues, eat, drink, sleep, and live with them. A drunkard must never be entrusted with severe problems. The soul survives on truth. The conscience speaks for the soul. When the soul is sold to the devil, the conscience dies. The mind, brain, conscience, and soul sink into total darkness. The man, the actual victim, is then doomed to an ignominious end. Bhutto, Mujib, and Indra Gandhi fell victim to the same demon. We are following a beaten path. Our quest for truth, as it seems, has yet to begin. The mind is inactive, the brain lethargic, the soul is thirsty, and the conscience confounded. We must get out of the darkness of the self and turn towards Light in real earnest. In it lies the deliverance.   
- The writer has served the Pakistan Army as Major General. He has authored a book "Pakistan: In Search of a Messiah"

Askari Raza Malik



God is only positive. His path leads to light, which means good. Satan leads humans towards darkness or evil. God's ways inculcate humility, kindness, forgiveness, patience, justice, tolerance, accommodation, and peace. Satan signifies arrogance, vendetta, anger, intolerance, stubbornness, and high-handedness. A satanic regime can never endure. For the rulers...

## Briefs

## IMF ready to work with new...

FROM PAGE 01  
write a letter to the global lender urging it to call for an audit of the February 8 election before it continues talks with Islamabad for a new loan programme. "Imran Khan will issue a letter to the IMF today. The charter of IMF, EU, and other organisations stipulates that they can function or provide loans to a country only if there's good governance," the PTI leader's counsel Barrister Ali Zafar told reporters at the Adiala Jail on Thursday. Zafar said the mandate of the people was stolen in the darkness of night, insisting that democracy could not run if the mandate of the people was stolen. He said the whole world had seen rigging taking place in the general elections.

## Imran Khan confirms...

FROM PAGE 01  
audit of the February 8 election before it continues talks with Islamabad for a new loan programme. However, it remains to be seen if the PTI founder's letter would lead to the desired result he seeks as the IMF today expressed willingness to work with the new Pakistani government while ignoring his demand. Meanwhile, former finance minister Ishaq Dar said that the letter holds no significance, adding that if the PTI founder has written against the country's national interest then it is condemnable. "Writing anything for personal gain is shameful. PTI founder's letter will have no significance," Dar, a senior leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), told media outside the Punjab Assembly.

## Newly-elected...

FROM PAGE 01  
the session commenced after a significant delay. Around 215 lawmakers of the PML-N and allied party lawmakers along with 98 Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) and PTI-backed lawmakers were administered by outgoing speaker Sibtain Khan. Khan also issued the schedule for the election - to be held on Saturday - of the new speaker and deputy speaker of the Punjab Assembly. The process for submitting nomination papers and scrutiny of the same will be conducted till 5:30 pm, and the election will take place on February 24 through a secret ballot.

## PPP picks Murad for...

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Murad Ali Shah for Sindh Chief Minister, Owais Shah for Speaker, and Naveed Anthony for Deputy Speaker. In his address to the party members, Bilawal expressed gratitude to the people of Sindh for their unwavering support, emphasising that the electoral success achieved was not just a victory for the PPP but a testament to the trust bestowed upon them by the citizens of the province. "The people of Sindh have not only made us successful but have also given us a better mandate than in the past," stated Bilawal. He went on to acknowledge that with increased expectations from the people, the PPP is committed to addressing the pressing issues faced by the province.

## Pak warns of consequences...

FROM PAGE 01  
Meanwhile, Indonesia's representative expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause and condemned Israel's blatant violations of international law, emphasizing the humanitarian catastrophe occurring in Gaza. She stated that the Israeli occupation is illegal and must come to an end, noting Israel's lack of intention to respect its legal obligations, as evident from Netanyahu's statement: "No one will stop us, not The Hague, not the axis of evil and not anyone else."

# Dutch OHC Bully Hockey Club wins 3-match series

## Beat HEC team on penalty shoot-out

SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Dutch hockey club OHC Bully won hockey series by defeating HEC team on pen-

ty shoot-outs. The two matches players earlier in Lahore ended in a draw. The hockey series was facilitated by the Khawaja Junaid academy, run by Olympian Khawaja Junaid. High Commission-

ers of Australia Neil Hawkins, Kyrgyzstan and Morocco also witnessed the final match apart from a large number of spectators. International Umpir Sohail Januja

of the Rising Stars Hockey club supervised the final match along with the Dutch. President of Rising Stars Hockey Club Mehmood Ahmed along with team members and officials of the Rising Stars

Hockey Club presented a souvenir to the Dutch hockey team. The female players of the Rising Stars club acted as the support ground staff. Azeem Jutt, Ali Rizwan and Adnan headed the Jury.



# India defeats Pakistan, levels T20 Blind series

The Consul General Hussain Muhammad said that people of Pakistan and India always enjoy cricket matches played between the two countries, but this match had impressed him a lot. "It was for the first time that I watched a live match played by visually challenged players and their talent has really impressed me a lot

AFZAL JAVED

DUBAI: Sunil Ramesh slammed a superb 87 as India defeated Pakistan by 46 runs in the second match of the three-match Pak-India bilateral Blind T20 cricket series at International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket Academy Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Friday. Pakistan again won the toss and opted to bowl first, a strategic move considering the dew factor. India, seizing the opportunity, put up a daunting total of 224 runs

on the scoreboard within the stipulated 20 overs for the loss of 3 wickets. Sunil Ramesh showcased his batting ability with an impressive 87 runs off 61 balls, while Venkatesh Rao and Ajay Kumar Reddy contributed crucial runs with 56 and 42 respectively. Despite their efforts, Pakistan's bowlers, led by Zafar Iqbal who claimed only one wicket, struggled to break through consistently. In reply, Pakistan's batsmen started confidently but faltered under the pressure of the challenging target. Despite valiant efforts from

Salman, who scored a resilient 58 off 42 balls, and contributions from Badar Munir 30 off 16 balls and Nisar Ali's 25 runs, Pakistan fell short, reaching 178 runs for the loss of 6 wickets in their allotted overs. Ajay Reddy, Durga Rao, and Debaraj made crucial breakthroughs for the Indian side, restricting Pakistan's chase. Hussain Muhammad, the Consul General at Pakistan Consulate General Dubai was the chief guest of the occasion, he was accompanied by the Syed Sultan Shah President World Blind Cricket Council (WBCC), Ek Radha Krishnan Chairman Organizing Committee, Shabana Abdul Razzak Global Ladies Chair World Memon Origination (WMO), Rajnesh Henry first Vice President of World Blind Cricket Council, Sabeen Gul Vice President/Wing Head CSR National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), Junaid Iqbal CSR Officer NBP and other dignitaries were also present during ceremony. The Consul General Hussain Muhammad said that people of Pakistan and India always enjoy cricket matches played between

the two countries, but this match had impressed him a lot. "It was for the first time that I watched a live match played by visually challenged players and their talent has really impressed me a lot. Dubai is a hub for trade, sports and diplomacy that provides an ideal environment for such types of healthy and positive activities among the neighboring countries", said the Consul General. He said that cricket and all other sports give the message of peace and promote love amongst people by dispelling misunderstandings

and hatred. Congratulating the winning Indian team on today's victory, the Consul General appreciated the players of Pakistani team for their efforts and also winning the first match of the three matches' series. "Both the teams played well today. We look forward to a sensational and decisive final match of the tournament taking place on Sunday", said Mr. Hussain. With the series now leveled at 1-1, anticipation surges for the decisive encounter scheduled for the 25th February at ICC Cricket Academy.

and the Consul General Hussain Muhammad said that people of Pakistan and India always enjoy cricket matches played between the two countries, but this match had impressed him a lot. "It was for the first time that I watched a live match played by visually challenged players and their talent has really impressed me a lot. Dubai is a hub for trade, sports and diplomacy that provides an ideal environment for such types of healthy and positive activities among the neighboring countries", said the Consul General. He said that cricket and all other sports give the message of peace and promote love amongst people by dispelling misunderstandings

## Hamas calls for holding Israel....

FROM PAGE 01  
targeted a residential neighborhood in the city of Deir al-Balah, on Thursday evening, resulting in the martyrdom of about 40 civilians the majority of whom children and women. On Thursday evening, a horrific massacre was carried out in Deir al-Balah in Central Gaza, as Israeli warplanes bombed four homes, leaving 40 martyrs and more than 100 injured. More than 90% of them were children and women. Israeli occupation forces continue to commit the crime of genocide in the Gaza Strip for the 140th consecutive day Friday, through dozens of air strikes, artillery shelling, and the use of fire belts, while carrying out bloody massacres against civilians and committing horrific crimes in infiltration areas. This is happening amidst a catastrophic humanitarian situation resulting from the siege and the displacement of more than 90% of the population.

## Gohar 'removed'...

FROM PAGE 01  
news channel, Marwat said: "Incompetence and poor performance are the reasons behind Gohar's removal as chairman. Barrister Gohar is a gentleman but his performance was not satisfactory." Responding to a question, the PTI leader said that Gohar failed to meet the workers' expectations. "To run a party office, one has to be active all the time, but this did not happen." Following the election results, the party leadership's approach was not commendable, he said, adding that Gohar should have led the party after the polls but he failed. A day earlier, Gohar, while announcing the nominee for the top slot said: "This time, our candidate for party chairman will be Barrister Ali Zafar and Omar Ayub secretary general."

## ECP notifies victory of...

FROM PAGE 01  
The PTI had earlier moved the Islamabad High Court (IHC), challenging the ECP's notification but the court disposed of the petition and referred the matter back to the commission. On Wednesday, the court declared that the victory notifications of the PML-N candidates would remain suspended till the ECP's decision on the pending cases. The order came from an IHC bench comprising Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb and Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir which heard the intra-court appeals (ICA) filed by PTI-backed candidates Barrister Shoaib Shaheen, Amer Mughal and Ali Bokhari.

## Protesting Indian...

FROM PAGE 01  
security forces about 200km (125 miles) north of the capital, with water cannons and teargas being used to push them back. Farmer leaders on Thursday announced a series of "mega programmes" across India to press their demands. The "Black Day" today will be followed by a tractor rally on highways on Feb 26, and a farm workers' public meeting in Delhi on March 14. Black flags were hoisted on tractors and trolleys lined up at the protest site on Friday. Several protesters, most of whom are Sikhs from the northern state of Punjab, also tied black cloth over their turbans in solidarity.

## Charles' secret...

FROM PAGE 01  
The revelation comes in the wake of Buckingham Palace's announcement on February 5, disclosing the King's cancer diagnosis following surgery for an enlarged prostate. Sources close to the palace reveal that despite his health challenges, King Charles, 75, remains resolute in ensuring a smooth transition for the monarchy. Renowned royal expert Tom Quinn sheds light on the covert operations within the palace, affirming the integral role Prince William plays in the succession blueprint.

**Briefs****Palestine seeks broad support for UN membership**

WASHINGTON: The Palestinian state is preparing to seek full U.N. membership and ask member states to endorse its admission, the country's ambassador to the United Nations said. "We will intensify these discussions and we will use a variety of things, including we might have a statement and solicit signatures from member states welcoming and supporting the admission of the State of Palestine to membership before in fact going to the (UN) Security Council and to submit a resolution calling for recommendation to admit the state of Palestine as a member of the UN," Riyad Mansour told reporters in New York. His remarks came a day after Israel's parliament, the Knesset, voted 99-11 to back a decision by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to reject any unilateral recognition of Palestinian statehood. "It's only us, the Palestinian people, who will determine our right to self-determination, including the independence of our state."—Agencies

**Philippines takes cancer screening into the workplace**

MANILA: Saddled with high cancer rates and late diagnoses, the Philippines is trying a whole new tack: asking businesses to step into state shoes and screen millions of workers for early signs of the disease. Be it cervical, breast or colon cancer, the Southeast Asian nation wants to lower its cancer deaths by increasing screening. Medics say early detection is key to improving survival rates, so last year the government changed course and opted to partner with the private sector to boost testing levels. In September, the government ordered all employers to set up cancer prevention and control programs to ease pressures on time- and cash-poor staff, who must otherwise contribute to the cost of diagnosis and treatment themselves. Employers are now required to give employees access to cancer screening, by referrals to reputable health facilities or conducting free screenings themselves. The order stemmed from the landmark National Integrated Cancer Control Act, which pledged better screening, diagnosis and treatment and to make health services "more equitable and affordable for all, especially for the underprivileged, poor and marginalized."—APP

**Germany set to join legal cannabis club**

BERLIN: The German parliament is about to vote on a new law to allow the recreational use of cannabis. If MPs vote yes, over 18s in Germany will be allowed to possess substantial amounts of cannabis, but strict rules will make it difficult to buy the drug. Smoking cannabis in many public spaces would then become legal from 1 April. Possession of up to 25g, or almost an ounce, would be allowed in public spaces, and in private homes the legal upper limit would be 50g. Already police in some parts of Germany, such as Berlin, often turn a blind eye to smoking in public, although possession of the drug for recreational use is illegal and can be prosecuted. Use of the drug among young people has been soaring for years despite the existing law, says Health Minister Karl Lauterbach, who is instigating the reforms. He wants to undermine the black market, protect smokers from contaminated cannabis and cut revenue streams for organised crime gangs. But legal cannabis cafes will not suddenly spring up all over the country. A ferocious debate about decriminalising cannabis has been raging for years in Germany, with doctors' groups expressing concerns for young people and conservatives saying that liberalisation.—Agencies

# Iran rejects baseless claims over Ukraine war

Both Iran and Russia have repeatedly denied claims that Tehran has provided Moscow with weapons to be used in the war in Ukraine.

**NEWS DESK**

TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says the repetition of baseless claims against the Islamic Republic over the war in Ukraine has reached a "boring stage". Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks at a joint press conference with his Hungarian counterpart Peter Szijarto in Tehran. Iran's top diplomat noted that they discussed bilateral relations and the latest global developments, including the conflict in Ukraine, adding "I would like to once again strongly condemn the baseless accusations leveled against Iran regarding Russia's use of Iranian weapons." "The repetition of baseless claims has reached a boring stage," he said. Amir-Abdollahian's remarks came as US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on Thursday that Washington will be "imposing additional sanctions on Iran in the coming days" over its alleged efforts to supply Russia with drones and other technology for the war. Both Iran and Russia have repeatedly denied claims that Tehran has provided Moscow with weapons to be used in the war in Ukraine. The anti-Iran claims first emerged in July 2022, when US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan alleged that Washington had received "information" indicating that the Islamic Republic was preparing to provide Russia with "up to several hundred drones, including weapons-capable UAVs on an expedited timeline" for use in the war. Elsewhere in his remarks, Iran's top diplomat noted that he and Szijarto also discussed Israel's genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip that began in October. "We had frank discussions on the logic behind Iran's support for the Palestinian people. I also asked Hungary to use all its capacity to stop the war and restore sustainable security to the region," Amir-Abdollahian said. He slammed the US and Britain's attempts to extend the war to other parts of the world as "a mistake", stressing that Yemenis are acting independently regarding pro-Palestine operations. The US and the UK have been carrying out numerous attacks against Yemen as a means of trying to pressure the country into stopping a series of operations that it has been conducting in support of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, the Yemeni armed forces have targeted ships in the Red Sea with owners linked to Israel or those going to and from ports in the occupied territories. Tehran-Budapest ties The visit of Szijarto, who also acts as the minister of trade, to Iran came as Tehran and Budapest held a joint economic commission earlier on

Thursday. "Relations between the two countries are developing," Amir-Abdollahian said, adding that a protocol of the economic commission and a road map for cooperation in the field of agriculture were signed during the session of the commission. Budapest concerned about war in West Asia For his part, Szijarto hailed the bilateral ties between the two countries as "strong", expressing

## Zelensky urges US Congress to approve new aid

WASHINGTON: President Volodymyr Zelensky called on the US Congress to approve additional aid for Kyiv, saying in an interview broadcast that a failure to do so will cost Ukrainian lives. Republican lawmakers in the House of Representatives have stalled the approval of \$60 billion in new aid for Ukraine, and Zelensky made his appeal for action during an interview with Fox News — a favored channel for US conservatives. "Will Ukraine survive without Congress' support? Of course. But not all of us," Zelensky told Fox's Bret Baier in an interview near a front line in Ukraine. The Ukrainian leader also warned that the price of helping Kyiv now is much lower than the potential cost of confronting Russian President Vladimir Putin later if he succeeds in Ukraine. The United States has provided tens of billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine and is by far Kyiv's biggest donor. But existing funding has dried up, and former president Donald Trump's allies in the House have been stalling new assistance. Trump, the likely Republican nominee in the November presidential election, opposes helping Kyiv and recently used his sway to kill a US border reform bill that would have also authorized additional aid to Ukraine. Zelensky told the Munich Security Conference on Saturday that he was ready to take Trump to the frontlines in Ukraine, saying policy makers should see what real war entails. Meanwhile, IMF approves \$880 million for Ukraine The International Monetary Fund said Thursday it will disburse \$880 million to Ukraine in the third phase of a \$15.6 billion aid package approved last year as Kyiv fights the Russian invasion. The aid, announced almost two years to the day after Russian forces poured across the border, must still be approved by the IMF executive board. "Performance under the program has been strong despite the challenges of the war," said Gavin Gray, the head of an IMF team that met recently with Ukrainian officials in Warsaw. The team assessed the goals established a year ago when the four-year aid package was approved.—Agencies

his country's concern over the ongoing war in the West Asia region. He warned that the escalation of the situation and the spillover of the war in Gaza into the region "could be a great threat to the global security." Israel launched the war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas waged the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in

response to the Israeli regime's decades-long campaign of bloodletting and devastation against Palestinians. Since the start of the offensive, the Tel Aviv regime has killed at least 29,514 Palestinians and injured more than 69,616 others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under the rubble in Gaza, which is under "complete siege" by Israel.

## Malaysia: Israeli occupation violates Palestinians' rights

Malaysian foreign minister tells hearing at International Court of Justice that occupation is illegal due to its violation of international law

**FOREIGN DESK**

ANKARA: Malaysia told a hearing at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that Palestine has the right to self-determination and that this right has been violated due to the Israeli occupation. The hearings, where the legal consequences of Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian territories are being discussed, are taking place at the Peace Palace in The Hague, the administrative capital of the Netherlands. Speaking on behalf of Malaysia, Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan highlighted that the occupation is illegal due to its violation of international law and emphasized the need for an immediate end

to the occupation. Hasan said it is essential for the ICJ to express its views on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, as this opinion would assist in delivering a fair judgment on the occupation, annexation and discriminatory policies in Palestine. Emphasizing the violation of international law, occupation law and laws regulating annexation and the use of force through the establishment of illegal settlements in the occupied territories, Hasan pointed out that all these actions further violate the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. He also noted that the blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza deprives the local population of basic necessities and called for continued support for the UN agency for Palestinian

refugees, or UNRWA, which is facing challenges due to some countries discontinuing financial support based on Israeli claims that 12 of UNRWA's 13,000 employees in the Gaza Strip took part in the Hamas-led assault on Israel last year. Speaking about "the unquestionable validity of the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people," Hasan said that in addition to ending the occupation, Israel should compensate Palestine for the violations and damages it has caused. Jagdish D. Koonjul, the Permanent Representative of Mauritius to the UN, speaking on behalf of Mauritius also highlighted the need to end Israel's illegal occupation and provide the Palestinian people with the right to self-determination. Referring to the role of the ICJ in the

decolonization of the Chagos Archipelago, Koonjul highlighted the importance of a consultative opinion to initiate a similar negotiation process between Israel and Palestine. Supporting the two-state solution, Koonjul said: "Indeed, this is the only solution that can bring about lasting peace. We believe that Palestinians should live in freedom within their own state. Additionally, we believe that Palestine possesses all the necessary qualifications to be recognized as a state." Pierre Klein, a professor of international law at the Free University of Brussels, drew attention to the longstanding Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, emphasizing that the occupation, which has turned into an "annexation," is illegal.

## Senegal President to step down on April 2

DAKAR: Senegal President Macky Sall said on Thursday that April 2 will be the end of his mandate as president of the West African nation. He added, however, that it was unlikely the election of a new president will be completed before then. Sall's announcement could assuage fears he was planning to extend his rule in the country, an issue that had contributed to a tense political climate, and sometimes violent protests in a country seen as one of the stable democracies in the region. His announcement came after the country's Constitutional Council, the highest election authority, ruled last week that a 10-month postponement of the vote was unlawful. The election had initially been scheduled for Feb. 25. "April 2, 2024, will be the end of my term at the head of the country, the end of my binding relationship with the Senegalese people as president of the republic. I would like this debate to be clearly settled," Sall said during an interview on national television. Sall said however that he cannot issue a decree to hold the election before a national dialogue takes place. The dialogue, which would include civil society groups, political parties and candidates, is set to begin on Monday and will likely finish by Tuesday, he said. He said that candidates who had not been approved by the Constitutional Council would also be invited to the dialogue. Prominent opposition figures including the firebrand jailed politician Ousmane Sonko and Karim Wade, the son of former president Abdoulaye Wade, were excluded from the list of 19 candidates approved for the election.—DNA

## Somalia lauds defence pact with Turkiye

ANKARA: Somalia's Defence Minister Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur describes the country's landmark defence pact with Turkiye as a harbinger of positive change that "ushers in a new era in our nation's pursuit of a secure and flourishing future". Speaking media in his first interview following his appointment as Somalia's defence minister, Nur says the agreement represents a collective dedication to eradicating all variants of illicit activities, setting the stage for the establishment of a proficient naval force, a cornerstone for Somalia's maritime defence. "We extend our profound appreciation to the fraternal Republic of Turkiye for their steadfast, prompt support and their resolute commitment to fostering peace, stability, and wealth across our region," says Nur. On Monday, Somalia's parliament passed a bilateral defence and economic collaboration pact, a 10-year agreement that gives authority to Turkiye to protect Somali waters. The pact not only covers protecting Somalia's waters but also sets the stage for the establishment of a naval force to secure the Horn of Africa nation. "Furthermore, the agreement promises to reinforce our burgeoning blue economy, stimulate key economic sectors, and forge new paths for prosperity for both our citizens and the wider region," the defence minister tells media person. "We extend our profound appreciation to the fraternal Republic of Turkiye for their steadfast, prompt support and their resolute commitment to fostering peace, stability, and wealth across our region," he says, praising Turkiye's support. "We are optimistic that, with the expertise and backing of Turkish naval personnel, our Naval Forces will progress through rigorous training to achieve global standards."—APP



JAKARTA: Ambassador Ameer Khurram Rathore called on Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao, PM of Timor-Leste. Discussions focused on bolstering bilateral relations between Pakistan and Indonesia. Ambassador reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthening ties & supporting Timor-Leste's National Development.—DNA

## Russia modernizes almost all nuclear forces: Putin

**WEB DESK**

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that 95% of Russia's strategic nuclear forces had been modernized and that the Air Force had just taken delivery of four new supersonic nuclear-capable bombers. Putin made the comments in a recorded speech to mark Russia's annual Defender of the Fatherland Day, which celebrates the armed forces, a day after he flew on a modernised Tu-160M nuclear-capable strategic bomber. On the eve of the second anniversary of the start of the war in Ukraine, the Russian leader praised soldiers fighting there in what he

called a "special military operation", hailing them as heroes battling for "truth and justice." He also laid a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier at the foot of the Kremlin wall to honour those who have fallen in battle. He devoted much of his speech to what he said were the achievements of the military-industrial complex. His message: that Russia's nuclear triad — its strategic land, sea and air nuclear capabilities — were up to date, being constantly modernised, and in good order. "Incorporating our real combat experience, we will continue to strengthen the Armed Forces in every possible way, including ongoing re-equipping and modernisation efforts," Putin said. "Today, the share of modern weapons and equipment in the strategic nuclear forces has already reached 95 percent, while the naval component of the 'nuclear triad' is at



almost 100 percent," he added. Putin said that Russia had started serial production of its new Zircon hypersonic missiles and that new strike systems, which he did not specify, were being tested. New strategic submarines had been added to the navy, and four Tu-160M nuclear-capable bomber planes of the type he flew in on Thursday had just been delivered to the armed forces. "Next in line is the development and serial production of promising models, the introduction of artificial intelligence technologies in the military sphere," he said. Putin has frequently said that Russia's latest generation of advanced weapons is unmatched by any rival, but

some of its new systems have seen delays in testing and deployment. Last month, the head of the company that makes the Zircon hypersonic missile was quoted by state media as saying that putting it into service was "not a quick procedure" and would involve "a certain amount of testing". In the course of the war in Ukraine, Putin has repeatedly reminded the West of Russia's nuclear capabilities. The plane he flew in on Thursday is capable of carrying 12 cruise missiles or 12 short-range nuclear missiles and can fly 12,000 km (7,500 miles) non-stop without refuelling. Putin described it as new and reliable after a 30-minute demo flight that a state TV reporter called a "unique event".

COLOMBO: Over 15,000 Dengue cases have been reported in Sri Lanka so far in 2024 along with five deaths, the National Dengue Control Unit (NDCU) said on Friday. According to the latest update by the NDCU, 10,417 cases were reported in January and 4,996 cases so far in February. The Western Province accounts for the highest number of 5,275 cases, followed by the Northern Province with 3,657 cases. Last year, a total of over 88,000 dengue cases were reported with a death toll of 57, according to the NDCU.—DNA

**Sudan's warring sides attacked fleeing civilians**

Khartoum Both sides in Sudan's civil war have committed abuses that may amount to war crimes including indiscriminate attacks on civilian sites like hospitals, markets and even camps for the displaced, the UN human rights office said. "Some of these violations would amount to war crimes," Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a statement on Friday accompanying the report. "The guns must be silenced, and civilians must be protected." Separate from the report, which investigates incidents through to December, Turk's office said that it had reviewed "credible" though unconfirmed video evidence appearing to show soldiers in army uniform parading with the decapitated heads of perceived RSF supporters while chanting ethnic slurs. Sudan's army said the footage was "shocking" and that it would investigate. A UN rights spokesperson said Turk's office would follow up with Sudanese authorities on the progress of the investigation. The US has already formally determined that the warring parties have committed war crimes and said the RSF and allied militias were involved in ethnic cleansing in West Darfur. Both sides have said they would investigate reports of killings and abuses and prosecute any fighters found to be involved. It describes incidents in the capital Khartoum where dozens of individuals were arrested and placed outside near RSF military posts to deter air strikes from Sudanese fighter jets. UN investigators have so far documented cases of sexual violence affecting 118 people, including one woman who was detained and repeatedly gang-raped for weeks.—DNA

**UK, EU border agency agree migration pact**

LONDON: The United Kingdom will sign an agreement with the EU border agency Frontex on Friday to work together to crack down on irregular immigration, the government in London said. Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made stopping migrants crossing the Channel on boats from France a priority before a general election due this year. Friday's agreement provides for the exchange of intelligence between Frontex and the UK Border Force to help disrupt people smuggling gangs, Britain's interior ministry said in a statement. It also agrees to collaborate on the development of new technologies, such as the use of drones to protect borders, the Home Office added. UK's Sunak eyes "second half" of 2024 for election UK Border Force director general Phil Douglas and Frontex executive director Hans Leijtens are due to formally sign the arrangement in London. "Organised immigration crime and people smuggling are global challenges that require shared solutions and ambitions," said UK interior minister James Cleverly. "Our landmark working arrangement between the UK and Frontex is another crucial step in tackling illegal migration, securing our borders and stopping the boats."—Agencies

**Over 15,000 Dengue cases reported in SL**

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## Briefs

**Kartarpur Corridor symbol of peace: President**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Friday said the Kartarpur Corridor was a symbol of peace and Pakistan always welcomed Sikh Yatraes to visit their sacred places extending them all possible facilities. During his visit to Kartarpur Corridor in Narowal, the president said that Pakistan, through the corridor had sent a message to the world, expressing its desire for peace. He said such more steps of inter-religion harmony would promote peace and stability in the region. "Sikhism has always taught peace and unity, bringing people together", President Alvi said adding that Pakistan's initiatives for the convenience of Sikh pilgrims were commendable. On the occasion, Chief Executive Officer of the Project Management Unit briefed the president on the measures taken to facilitate Sikh pilgrims in Kartarpur Sahib. President Alvi was informed about the Sikh religion and the history of Kartarpur Sahib. Later, he visited various places in Kartarpur Sahib and appreciated the arrangements made for pilgrims. The president also visited the museum and the community kitchen, also known as Langar Khana.

## UN lauds Pakistani peacekeepers

FOREIGN DESK

NEW YORK: The head UN Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, has praised efforts of Pakistani peacekeepers to maintain peace and stability in the restive regions. Interacting with Pakistani peacekeepers serving the U.N. Interim Security Force for Abyei, he said establishment of peace is collective desire of all nations. Jean-Pierre Lacroix laid a floral wreath at the martyrs' monument and observed one-minute silence in honour of the memory of the fallen Pakistan Army soldiers. The Unit Commander of the Pakistani peacekeepers briefed the visiting guests about the initiatives undertaken by the Pakistan battalion to ensure peace and stability in the area. They were also informed about the role and tasks being undertaken by the Pakistan Battalion's female staff in the allied areas such as healthcare in addition to peacekeeping duties. Jean-Pierre Lacroix also recalled his recent visit to Wahga border, near Lahore, where he was also briefed about the efforts of Pakistan to promote religious harmony, citing the establishment of Kartarpur Corridor.

# Iranian envoy meets PRCS head highlights cooperation

The foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan had a telephone conversation. Jilani told Amir Abdullahian: Everyone in Pakistan is waiting for president Raisi's visit

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Reza Amiri, the Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan, reaffirmed the crucial importance of humanitarian service, expressing a steadfast dedication to advancing humanitarian efforts in Pakistan through cooperation with the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS). In a meeting held at the PRCS National Headquarters, Dr. Amiri and the Chairman of the Red Crescent, Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari, emphasized the significance of joint efforts in improving public health services across Pakistan. Dr. Amiri detailed strategies for fostering bilateral collaboration with the aim of bolstering fraternal ties, particularly through healthcare endeavors in Pakistan in partnership with PRCS. He highlighted PRCS's advancement under the dynamic and forward-thinking leadership of Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari, affirming Iran's eagerness to contribute to public health infrastructure. He underscored the potential for setting exemplary precedents in the realms of education and healthcare. Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari, while conversing with Iranian Ambassador Dr. Reza Amiri, emphasized the importance of Iran's participation in public health projects and the provision of dialysis facilities for individuals afflicted with kidney diseases. Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari expressed gratitude to the Iranian Red Crescent for sending relief supplies to the flood-affected individuals in Balochistan. He stressed the urgency of cooperation from Iran in training and enhancing the skills of medical professionals. The discussions also emphasized the need for cooperation in training and enhancing the capabilities of medical personnel, particularly in addressing common diseases. Both leaders discussed the significance of robust public health infrastructure in benefiting communities with limited capabilities. Dr. Amiri commended the humanitarian aid extended by the Pakistan Red Crescent to flood victims and conveyed assurance in pursuing continued collaboration with the organization.

## Govt greenlights completion of IP gas pipeline project

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE) granted approval on Friday for the initiation of work on the 80-kilometer segment of the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project within the country. According to a press release, the committee, acting on a recommendation from the Petroleum Division, has endorsed the commencement of the project, starting from the Pakistan-Iran border up to Gwadar in the initial phase. Inter State Gas Systems (Pvt) Ltd. is set to execute the project, which will be funded through the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC). All relevant divisions have given their positive approval to move forward, with the primary objective of meeting the increasing energy needs of Pakistan and ensuring a stable supply of gas to its citizens. The press release emphasised the significance of the project for enhancing the energy security of Pakistan and instilling confidence in the local industry through improved gas supplies. The project is anticipated to stimulate economic activity in the Balochistan province, thereby contributing to the overall economic progress of Pakistan. Earlier in the week, apakistani newspaper reported that Islamabad has committed to completing the first phase of the 80-kilometer IP gas pipeline project within its territory to avert a potential \$18 billion penalty. Iran has granted a 180-day extension until September 2024, aiming to avoid litigation in international courts.



ISLAMABAD: Dr. Reza Amiri, the Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan meets Chairman of the Red Crescent, Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari. – DNA

## PML-N picks Malik Ahmad for PA speaker

The swearing-in ceremony meant the Punjab Assembly has begun its fresh journey after the Feb 8 general elections

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: The PML-N is pitting party leader Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan against Sunni Ittehad Council's Malik Ahmad Khan Bhachar for the coveted slot of Punjab Assembly speaker. According to sources, the nomination papers of both the contestants have been accepted by the secretary of outgoing Speaker Sibtain Khan after scrutiny. Similarly, PML-N's Malik Zaheer Iqbal Channer will contest against SIC's Moeen Riaz for the office of deputy speaker. Their nomination papers have also been accepted after completion of scrutiny. As per an announcement by the secretary of outgoing Speaker Sibtain Khan, elections for the speaker and deputy speaker will be held via a secret ballot on Saturday (tomorrow) under Rules 9 and 10 of the Rules of Procedure of the Provincial As-

sembly of Punjab, 1997. The session of the MPAs-elect was summoned by Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman after the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) partially notified lawmakers on seats reserved for minorities and women. Interacting with media on the Punjab Assembly premises, PML-N leader Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan criticised the PTI whose members have now joined the SIC for resorting to protest and crying foul over alleged "rigging". He said if there was no case registered against Mian Aslam Iqbal, PTI's nominee for the slot of Punjab chief minister, he should have joined the session. Earlier in the day, more than 300 MPAs-elect in Punjab took oath pledging to serve the country to the best of their abilities. The swearing-in ceremony meant the Punjab Assembly has begun its fresh journey after the Feb 8 general elections. The crucial Punjab Assembly session got underway after a delay of more than two hours. As many as 215 members of the PML-N and allies reached the assembly which saw sloganeering and protest by the Sunni Ittehad Council members. The two sides raised slogans against each other. There were 97 members of the opposition. Punjab Assembly Speaker Sibtain Khan administered oath to the newly-elected members.

## Three injured in blast in DI Khan

PESHAWAR: At least three people were wounded on Friday after an explosive planted in a motorcycle near the central market in the Drazanda area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan went off, officials said. Yaqoob Khan, the spokesperson of Dera Ismail Khan District Police Officer Abdul Rauf, confirmed the number of injuries to media. He said the injured were moved to the District Headquarters Hospital and the condition of one was critical. "Four shops and three motorcycles in the locality suffered severe damages," Khan said, adding that a large contingent of police arrived at the scene soon after the blast was reported. He added that the area had been cordoned off and an investigation was underway. Immediately after the incident, the KP government ordered a day-long closure of the district's Gomal University. "In pursuance of the directives of the Higher Education Department [...] the Gomal University will remain closed on February 23, 2024 (Friday)," a notification issued by the institution said. It added that the Gensam College will also remain shut both today and tomorrow. The notification did not provide a reason for the closure. In recent years, KP has witnessed a sharp spike in attacks throughout the province, particularly in its southern region, comprising districts Tank, DI Khan, Kohat, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Bannu, Karak and Lakki Marwat. Earlier this month, 10 cops were martyred while six were injured in a late-night attack on the Chodwan police station in Dera Ismail Khan. In December 2023, at least 25 soldiers were martyred and 27 terrorists were killed in three separate incidents in the district. That was the military's highest single-day death toll from terrorist attacks reported this year. – DNA

## Jamaat-e-Islami, PTI-backed members not to take oath



NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Opposition parties in Sindh announced to hold a joint protest outside the provincial assembly during the inaugural session against what they called 'historical rigging' in the General Elections 2024. The leaders of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) announced to protest in a joint press conference. PTI Sindh President Haleem Adil Sheikh said that the elec-

tions were 'rigged' in different ways in Karachi, Hyderabad, Larkana, and Sukkur. "There will be no talks with the Pakistan People's Party and Mutahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan as both the parties are beneficiaries of the rigging," Haleem Adil Sheikh added. JI Karachi Ameer Hafiz Naeemur Rehman said that newly elected members of his party as well as the PTI would not take oath in the inaugural session as a protest. He said that the PPP and MQM-P were awarded a 'fake' mandate of the province. "We will be expanding our protest," Hafiz Naeemur

Rehman said. JUI-F leader Rashid Soomro said that they would be holding a protest headed by the GDA leadership. "If the opposition parties are denied to hold peaceful protest, we will not be responsible for any mishap," Rashid Soomro. GDA's Safdar Abbasi termed the General Elections 2024 as the 'most rigged polls' in the country's history. He said that opposition parties would never accept the 'rigged' results. Safdar Abbasi also questioned the role of caretaker setup in Sindh, alleging interim Chief Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Baqar

GDA's Safdar Abbasi termed the General Elections 2024 as the 'most rigged polls' in the country's history. He said that opposition parties would never accept the 'rigged' results

to 'support' the PPP. It is pertinent to mention here that the GDA also held a protest demonstration at Hyderabad Bypass against 'rigging' in the elections in which other opposition parties also participated. Addressing the protest, GDA Chief Pir Sibghatullah Shah Rashdi, popularly known as Pir Pagara, said that the General Elections 2024 were 'sold' three months back. He said that he did not hold an election campaign as the elections were already 'sold'. Pir Pagara said that the PTI was 'expelled' from the electoral process based on Intra-party elections. "I don't consider Imran Khan a thief. If he is a thief, we all are thieves too," the GDA chief said.

## Imran Khan, Bushra Bibi challenge Idat case verdict

MEHTAB PIRAZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi, on Wednesday, separately moved the district and sessions court challenging the verdict in the "un-Islamic" nikah case, issued earlier this month. The former first couple's appeals will be marked by the sessions court today, as they approached the court weeks after a trial court handed them seven-year prison sentences and a Rs500,000 fine, each on February 3. Bushra Bibi has filed her appeal through her lawyers – Usman Gill, Khalid Yusuf and Salman Safdar – seeking annulment of the decision. The PTI founder's wife's petition stated that the judgment delivered by civil judge Quadratullah on February 3 was against the facts, while the indictment issued against Bushra on January 16 was also illegal. It added that the plea of jurisdiction was rejected without assigning any reason and that the civil court did not conduct the trial properly. "Bushra Bibi reserves the right to request discharge from the case," it stated. The petition further mentioned that the complainant and Bushra Bibi's former husband, Khawar Maneka, filed his complaint six years after she got married to Khan, while a similar application was earlier filed by another complainant. "The trial court observed the rules of

recourse, disregarding the Shari'a on divorce," the plea read. It added that the statements of complainant Khawar Maneka and witnesses kept changing, while Mufti Saeed could not prove his claim of a second nikah between Bushra and Khan. The delayed filing of the complaint raises doubts, while the civil judge also misused his judicial mind, the petition mentioned. Earlier this month, just a day ahead of the February 8 general elections, a trial court handed seven-year sentences, each, to Khan and his wife in the "un-Islamic nikah" case at the Adiala jail. The couple were also fined Rs500,000 each – for which the failure to pay provisions additional four months of incarceration. The verdict was pronounced by senior civil judge Quadratullah, a day after the hearing of the case was conducted inside the jail premises for 14 hours. The judge issued the court's verdict in the case pertaining to the plea filed by Bushra Bibi's ex-husband Khawar Maneka against what he referred to as an "un-Islamic and illegal nikah" with the former prime minister. Four witnesses in the case gave their statements, which were later cross-examined during the proceedings, while Khan and Bushra Bibi also recorded their statements under section 342. Bushra Bibi, who was placed under house arrest at her residence in Bani-gala following its status declared as a sub-jail, was presented before the court for the proceedings, while her husband Imran.

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