



Islamabad POST

Monday, December 23, 2024

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

Pope Francis again condemns 'cruelty' of Israeli strikes on Gaza

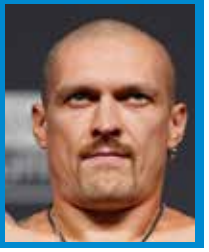
Detailed News On Page-08

China slams US as 'war-addicted'

Detailed News On Page-08

Oleksandr Usyk downs Fury to retain titles

Detailed News On Page-06



PTI accepts offer, talks today

Body formed to negotiate with the PTI

The committee includes Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Rana Sanaullah, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Naveed Qamar, Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Abdul Aleem Khan and Chaudhry Salik Hussain



ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

LAHORE, ISLAMABAD: In a significant political development, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday constituted a high-level committee comprising senior members of the coalition government to hold dialogue with the main opposition party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which has warned the incumbent rulers of civil disobedience. The committee includes Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Rana Sanaullah, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Naveed Qamar, Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Abdul Aleem Khan and Chaudhry Salik Hussain. A committee —

Continued on Page 06

PTI hails formation of negotiation committee

PTI spokesperson says committee to meet tomorrow on Ayaz Sadiq's invitation, hoping govt would show seriousness

KHAYAM ABABSI

ISLAMABAD: Following the much-anticipated development, the Imran Khan-founded Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has welcomed the formation of the government's committee for negotiations, calling it a "positive" step. PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan's remarks came as hope grows regarding a prospective dialogue between the ruling coalition and the opposition. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday constituted a high-level body to engage with the PTI in a major development amid the former ruling party's call for civil disobedience. "We consider the committee's formation a constructive step. Meaningful dialogue based on positive intentions should be held," Barrister Gohar said while reacting to the development. He stressed that the potential talks should have a defined timeframe,

Continued on Page 06

Naqvi briefs PM about political, security situation

Prime Minister on this occasion expressed his satisfaction at the measures

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at his Lahore residence. Naqvi, who is also interior minister of Pakistan, briefed the prime minister about the law and order situation in the country. The political situation of the country also came under discussion during the meeting.

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LAHORE: Federal Minister for Interior Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. — DNA

May 9 riots

Kh. Asif blames judiciary for 'delay' in justice

Military courts sentenced 25 accused on basis of evidences, says defence minister

FOREIGN DESK

LONDON: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Sunday held judiciary responsible for delay in taking the case involving those responsible for violence and rioting on May 9, 2023 to its logical conclusion. In a hard-hitting address from London, the defence minister dubbed incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan a "product of establishment" and said: "The matter of bringing those responsible for May 9 [mayhem] to justice was delayed due to the judiciary." His remarks came a day after 25 individuals involved in the May 9 attacks on the state installations were handed two to 10 years of "rigorous imprisonment" by the military courts in the first phase. "Urgent decisions were needed in the matter of May 9," added the minister.

Omar Ayub Criticises military courts' decision

Omar Ayub stated that military court verdicts were beyond the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court

DNA

HARIPUR: Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Omar Ayub has criticised the sentencing of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers by military courts, calling it unconstitutional. Speaking to the media in Haripur, Omar Ayub stated that military court verdicts were beyond the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. He argued that such unconstitutional actions deterred investment in the country,

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

FIA arrests two human smugglers

Modern technology was employed to track and arrest the culprits: FIA Gujranwala Zone Director

DNA

GUJRANWALA: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Gujranwala has apprehended two suspects, Muhammad Aslam and Saeed Ahmed, involved in the Greece boat tragedy and human smuggling operations. According to the FIA spokesperson, Muhammad Aslam is a key member of an international human smuggling gang and was directly involved in the Greece boat incident. He defrauded victims by promising safe passage to Europe, amassing a total of PKR 8.5 million. Aslam, along with accomplices,

Heli service in Kurram launched

CM also directed the supply of medicines via helicopter to meet urgent medical needs in the area

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: A helicopter service has been launched in Kurram on the orders of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CM Ali Amin Gandapur to tackle the rising tensions in the region. According to government sources, an MI-17 helicopter conducted two flights from Peshawar to Kurram yesterday, transferring 53 individuals, including 14 patients, from Parachinar to Peshawar. Today, the first flight transported 16 individuals, including jirga members and government staff, to Parachinar. The second flight moved 27 people from Parachinar to Thall, while the third flight is set to transport stranded individuals from Thall to Parachinar.

COAS Asim reaffirms

Pak Army determined to eliminate terrorism

Gen Munir commends troops' unwavering resilience, steadfastness in face of terrorism



STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir has expressed resolve that the Pakistan Army, in collaboration with law enforcement agencies (LEAs), remains determined to eliminate terrorism and extremism in all its forms, ensuring the restoration of lasting peace and stability across the country, the military's media wing said. The army chief made these remarks during his visit to Wana area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP) South Waziristan

district, the Inter-Services Public Relations said on Sunday. Upon his arrival in Wana, he was received by the Corps Commander Peshawar. During the visit, the ISPR said, the COAS received a comprehensive briefing on the prevailing security landscape and ongoing counter-terrorism operations. While interacting with the officers and the troops, he commended their unwavering resilience and steadfastness in the face of terrorism, reaffirming the nation's pride in their sacrifices. He emphasised that

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£190m reference case AC not to pronounce verdict today

The next hearing date to be provided tomorrow at the accountability court located in sector G-11

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court in Islamabad has notified the legal representatives of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, that the verdict in the £190 million reference case will not be announced today. According to sources within the accountability court stated that the decision in the high-profile case involving the PTI founder and his wife will not be delivered on the scheduled date. Court staff have informed PTI's legal team that the

Continued on Page 06

PIA set for debt-free privatisation with IMF aid

Federal privatisation minister assures privatisation process is moving swiftly, expects progress soon

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is set to be privatised free of its existing liabilities in a bid to enhance its appeal to potential investors, a Pakistani newspaper reported quoting Federal Privatisation Minister Abdul Aleem Khan. The minister, while making the announcement, reaffirmed the government's determination to address the long-standing challenges that have hindered PIA's privatisation. "Various issues impeding the privatisation of PIA have been resolved, and the remaining steps will be finalised soon," he said. Among the key developments, the minister revealed, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had agreed to two significant conditions to facilitate the airline's privatisation. These include the removal of 8% general sales tax on the purchase of new aircraft and the transfer of PIA's accumulated losses to a holding company. "Under the new terms, PIA's liabilities and old dues will be removed, ensuring that the airline is privatised without any financial baggage," Khan said.

Continued on Page 06

Polio vaccination made mandatory

Officials state that this step has been taken to ensure compliance from parents who refuse to vaccinate their children

DNA

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has linked issuance of important official certificates with polio vaccination. In 2024, Pakistan has reported 64 polio cases so far. As per details, the issuance of birth, marriage, and death certificates has been made conditional upon the administration of anti-polio drops in seven tehsils of Peshawar.

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Governors of Punjab and KP chief guest

Nadeem Asghar Kaira hosts grand Kisaan Convention in Lalamusa

The Kisaan Convention held under the aegis of the Kisaan Committee Members including Sajjad Ul Hassan, Ijaz Samma and Inayat Shah, General Secretary Punjab Hassan Murtaza, Former Information Minister and Governor Gilgit-Baltistan Qamar Zaman Kaira and District President Zia Mohiuddin

Governor KP forms political, technical committees for peace

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday announced the formation of political and technical committees in line with the unanimous decision made at the All Parties Conference. The committees aim to promote harmony among political parties and address key issues in the province. The notification, signed by Governor Kundi, reveals the establishment of an 11-member political committee and a 12-member technical committee. The political committee, chaired by Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, includes the following members: Federal Minister Engineer Amir Maqam Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Sikandar Hayat Khan Sherpao, Qaumi Watan Party, Maulana Atta-ur-Rehman Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl, Mian Ifthikhar Hussain Awami National Party, Syed Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha Pakistan Peoples Party, Mohsin Dawar National Democratic Movement, Professor Muhammad Ibrahim Khan Jamaat-e-Islami, Mahmood Khan Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentarian, Pervaiz Khattak Former Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shaukat Ullah Khan Representative of merged districts. This committee will work on enhancing cooperation between political parties and will make recommendations to reach a consensus on significant matters, fostering a unified political environment in the province. Additionally, a 12-member technical committee has been established, which will oversee the monitoring of developmental projects and provide technical suggestions. The members of this committee include, Dr. Ibadullah Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Maulana Lutfur-Rehman Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl.—APP



DNA

LALAMUSA: The Kisaan Convention, hosted by renowned PPP leader Nadeem Asghar Kaira at the historic Kaira House in Lalamusa, proved to be a landmark event for the agricultural community. As the second-largest Kisaan Convention after Sargodha, it brought together prominent political figures, farmers, and community leaders to discuss pressing issues faced by Punjab's agricultural sector. The event was graced by two notable chief guests: Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider and Governor KP Faisal Karim Kundi, who lauded the efforts of Nadeem Asghar Kaira in championing the cause of farmers. Organized under the aegis of the Kisaan Committee, which includes stalwarts like Sajjad Ul Hassan, Ijaz Samma, and Inayat Shah, along with PPP Punjab's General Secretary Hassan Murtaza and other key figures such as former federal minister Qamar Zaman Kaira and Zia Mohiuddin, the convention underscored a united effort to amplify the voices of the farming community. The speakers, including seasoned politicians and Kisaan representatives, highlighted the dire challenges facing Punjab's farmers, from water shortages and rising input costs to inadequate policy support. Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider, in his address, committed to taking the farmers' grievances to the provincial government and assured proactive steps to resolve their issues. He emphasized the PPP's historic role in

prioritizing agricultural development and reiterated the party's continued support for farmers. Governor KP Faisal Karim Kundi appreciated the initiative and stressed the importance of similar conventions across Pakistan to raise awareness and forge solutions. He praised Nadeem Asghar Kaira's leadership and foresight in organizing such

impactful gatherings. PPP Punjab's Secretary General Hassan Murtaza, himself from an agricultural background, passionately advocated for immediate government intervention. He shared his deep understanding of the farming community's struggles, urging authorities to implement sustainable policies. Former federal minister Qamar

Zaman Kaira extended heartfelt thanks to attendees, highlighting the pivotal role of farmers in sustaining Pakistan's economy and the PPP's unwavering commitment to their welfare. In his address, Nadeem Asghar Kaira revealed plans for more conventions in different cities, aiming to foster a comprehensive dialogue and solutions

framework. Expressing gratitude to PPP leadership, including Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, he affirmed his dedication to elevating the status of farmers and addressing their challenges. The Kisaan Convention at Kaira House not only emphasized the critical role of agriculture in Pakistan but also served as a platform for

policymakers and stakeholders to align their efforts in support of farmers. The commitment of leaders like Nadeem Asghar Kaira and the support of prominent PPP figures mark a significant step towards addressing the long-standing issues of the agricultural sector, reinforcing its role as the backbone of the nation's economy

Tessori lauds APPNA welfare initiatives

KARACHI: The Governor of Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori said on Sunday that Pakistan lacks no talent, noting that many renowned doctors in the United States are of Pakistani origin. He also highlighted that graduates from Dow University were making their mark globally. Speaking at a reception held in honor of the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America (APPNA) at Governor House, the Governor of Sindh welcomed the guests from the United States and praised the organizers for arranging the gala. Kamran Khan Tessori commended APPNA's welfare initiatives, emphasizing the necessity of utilizing the Association's expertise. He said that the doors of Governor House were open for the public and advanced IT courses were being conducted at the Governor House to empower the youth. The Governor of Sindh stressed the importance of improving individual actions and attitudes to uphold Pakistan's dignity, emphasizing that collective efforts were essential for country's progress.—APP

Pak-Romania business delegation meets Presidential Advisor to boost trade

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from the Pakistan Romania Business Council (PRBC) met with Legal Affairs Advisor to the President of Pakistan Justice (R) Irfan Qadir, at the President House on enhancing economic ties, ensuring justice for investors, and fostering bilateral trade. The PRBC delegation, including Chairman Sohail Shamim Firpo and Advisor and Chief Operating Officer Atif Farooqi, discussed ways to improve trade relations between Pakistan and Romania. Justice (R) Irfan Qadir highlighted the President's Office's role in providing swift relief and justice to citizens, businesses, and investors. He emphasized the need for strong coordination between the President's Office and the Ombudspersons' offices to resolve disputes and safeguard the rights of businesses and individuals. Justice Qadir assured the delegation of the government's support in promoting good governance and protecting stakeholders' interests. Sohail Shamim Firpo underlined the importance of efficient dispute resolution mechanisms in building investor confidence. "Such mechanisms are essential for fostering bilateral trade and creating a favorable environment for economic growth," he said. Atif Farooqi added that a stable legal framework and robust institutions are vital for unlocking trade potential between Pakistan and Romania. He reiterated the PRBC's commitment to strengthening economic ties and promoting mutual understanding between the two nations. Zia ul Rasheed Abbas, Director General of Legal Affairs at the President's Secretariat, stressed the importance of streamlining regulatory processes and resolving disputes promptly. "This approach will not only attract foreign investors but also enhance Pakistan's economic competitiveness globally," he noted. The meeting concluded with a shared vision of creating a business-friendly environment to boost bilateral trade and investment. Both sides agreed that fostering cooperation and people-to-people ties would pave the way for long-term economic growth.

Muzaffarabad transforms into a snow-kissed paradise this winter

ISLAMABAD: Muzaffarabad, the crown jewel of Azad Kashmir has been transformed into a magical winter wonderland where the city is beckoning tourists from far and wide to revel in its beauty, with hills majestically draped in a thick blanket of snow, crafting a breathtakingly beautiful landscape. According to a report aired by Pakistan Television (PTV), Muzaffarabad is in the grip of extremely low temperatures and the city's hotels and resorts are packed to capacity as tourists throng to experience the breathtaking winter scenery. As the mercury dips, the city's natural beauty is on full display, with snow-covered trees, frozen lakes and rolling hills creating a serene and peaceful atmosphere, said report. The city's infrastructure is well-equipped to handle the influx of tourists, with hotels, resorts and restaurants offering warm hospitality and delicious cuisine. "We have never seen so many tourists in Muzaffarabad before," said a local resident. "The snow-covered hills are a sight to behold and we are thrilled to see people from all over Pakistan coming to enjoy the beauty of our city." Visitors to the area are equally enthusiastic. "This is my first time in Muzaffarabad and I am absolutely loving it," said another tourist from Lahore. "The snow-covered hills, the frozen lakes it is like a dream come true. We will definitely be coming back here again," said a family. The local administration has taken steps to ensure the safety of tourists, with snow-clearing machines and ambulances on standby. "We are doing our best to provide all necessary facilities to the tourists," said Deputy Commissioner of Muzaffarabad. "We want to make sure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable experience in our beautiful city," he added. As the snow continues to fall, Muzaffarabad is likely to remain a top destination for tourists seeking a winter wonderland experience, said a local. With its stunning natural beauty and warm hospitality, this Azad Kashmir city is sure to leave a lasting impression on all who visit, said a foreign tourist.—APP

Book Bridging Horizons unlocks potential of Pakistan-Central Asia connectivity

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In an age where regional integration hinges on effective connectivity, Pakistan's strategic geographical position offers a vital gateway to landlocked Central Asian states, a cost-effective and strategically advantageous trading partner for Pakistan. Realizing the trade potential between these regions, however, requires overcoming policy, technical, and regional challenges through collaboration and visionary strategies. This was the central theme at the launch event for Bridging Horizons: Unraveling the Enigma of Connectivity between Pakistan and Central Asia, a book authored by Dr Faisal Javid, Dr Uzma Siraj, and Prof Dr Arkadiusz Zukowski. Published by IPS Press - the publishing arm of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad, the book explores the



historical, economic, and policy-driven dimensions of Pakistan-Central Asia relations, offering actionable insights into challenges and opportunities for fostering stronger ties. The launch ceremony, hosted at Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology (FUUAST), Islamabad, was addressed as chief guest by Ambassador (r) Riaz Hus-

sain Bukhari, Pakistan's former envoy to Uzbekistan, Prof Dr Ijaz Shafi Gilani, chairman Gallup Pakistan, Khalid Rahman, chairman IPS, Ambassador (r) Syed Abrar Hussain, vice chairman IPS, Dr Ihtsham Ul Haq, associate professor, FUUAST, Islamabad, and Dr Uzma Siraj, head IR Department, FUUAST. The event attracted an audience

of scholars, diplomats, policymakers, and students, reflecting the growing interest in Pakistan-Central Asia relations. The speakers highlighted the critical role of regional trade, the enduring cultural and historical bonds, and Pakistan's strategic location as a potential linchpin for multidimensional connectivity. Emphasizing the book's

central thesis, Dr Uzma Siraj underscored that connectivity is the cornerstone of regional integration, where Pakistan's strategic location connects landlocked Central Asian states to global markets. She noted that while the trade potential between Pakistan and Central Asian countries is immense, achieving this requires overcoming a multitude of challenges. In this context, she added that the book presents actionable strategies to enhance connectivity, including exploring alternative routes. In addition to exploring routes, it is important to ensure policy implementation and translate agreements into actions, Ambassador Riaz Hussain noted. It becomes urgent as Pakistan has signed over 255 bilateral and multilateral MoUs, protocols, and agreements with Central Asian countries since 1991. He projected that bilateral trade could grow to \$4 billion with robust policies.

CDA chief orders highest standards of construction work of project

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman CDA, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, along with the Member Engineering and other relevant officers, visited the Jinnah Avenue F-8 Interchange project on Sunday. He was informed that the Jinnah Avenue F-8 Interchange underpass will be opened for traffic on 24th December. He was further briefed that the under-

pass work has been completed within a record time. During the briefing, the Chairman was apprized that the underpass for the Jinnah Avenue Interchange project had been completed in just 42 days and will be inaugurated on 24th December with a formal ceremony. It was further briefed that the opening of the underpass will resolve 50% of the traffic issues at this intersection. Chairman CDA Muham-

mad Ali Randhawa instructed that the highest standards of construction work be ensured on all sections of the project. He said that the completion of the underpass in record time is a significant milestone for the city of Islamabad. The Chairman further added that the contractors and the relevant departments of CDA deserve congratulations for completing the underpass within the record time.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

DECEMBER	
Dec 01/Romania	National Day
Dec 02/United Arab Emirates	National Day
Dec 02/Laos Republic	National Day
Dec 05/Thailand	National Day
Dec 06/Finland	Independence Day
Dec 07/India	Armed Forces Flag Day
Dec 09/Tanzania	National Day
Dec 11/Oman	Armed Forces Day
Dec 12/Kenya	Independence Day
Dec 12/Turkmenistan	Neutrality Day
Dec 16/Bahrain	National Day
Dec 16/Kazakhstan	Independence Day
Dec 18/Qatar	National Day
Dec 18/Niger	National Day
Dec 23/Philippines	Armed Forces Day
Dec 23/Japan	National Day

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



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Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489
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Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
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RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
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Shifa International 4603666



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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Moroccan envoy fetes Pak-Morocco Parliamentary Friendship Group

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A dinner was organized by the Moroccan Ambassador to Pakistan, Mohammad Karmoune, at his residence in honor of the members of the Pak-Morocco Parliamentary Friendship Group. A large number of parliamentarians also attended the event. The participants included Additional Foreign Secretary for Africa Hamid Asghar Khan, former Prime Minister and Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf, Deputy Speaker National Assembly Ghulam Mustafa Shah, Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Barrister Daniyal Chaudhry, Mirza Ikhtiar Baig, Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, Bilal Azhar Kayani, Syed Naveed Qamar, Sardar Nabeel Ahmed Gabol, Senator Sahar Kamran, Shaista Pervez Malik, Nuzat Sadiq, Syed Khurshed Shah, Barrister Aqeel Malik, Zahra Wadood Fatemi, Sharmila Farooqui, Sabeen Gouri, Shagufta Jumani, Muhammad Khan Jamali Wahaj Bin Tahir, Rabia Basri, Mirza Ishtiaq Baig, Mian Akram Farid and renowned businessman Shahbaz Zaheer. On this occasion, the Moroccan Ambassador, who hosted the event, said that it is important for the parliaments of both countries to start a bilateral cooperation program that includes exchange of visits, exchange of experiences on legislative issues and exchange of documents, exchange of expertise. This exercise is associated with the aim of contributing to the consolidation of the rule of law. Exchange of good work of democratic institutions. At the multilateral level, our legislative institutions need to



harmonize their positions. Especially, there should be close cooperation on such factors that affect food, environment, and security. Speaking on this occasion, Ikhtiar Baig, Convener of the Pak-Morocco Parliamentary Friendship Group, said that I consider Morocco as my second home. I do my business in Morocco and have spent twenty years of my life in Morocco. And that is why representing the Pak-Morocco PFG is my first priority. Now I will talk about Mo-

rocco, Tariq bin Ziyad and Ibn bin Batuta, one of whom was a great general and the other a great traveler. Both great personalities hailed from Morocco. Morocco is the gateway to Africa and the Spanish coast is just a few kilometers away from Morocco. Tangier, the largest port in Africa and the Mediterranean, and Africa's new high-speed train 'El Buraq', with a speed of 350 km/h, faster and more comfortable than the Bullet Train and Eurostar, are all testa-

ments to the dynamic and capable leadership of King Mohammed. You will be happy to know that the next FIFA World Cup is going to be held in Morocco. Morocco has become the most popular tourist destination and more than 16 million tourists visited Morocco last year. The volume of bilateral trade between Pakistan and Morocco has increased to \$800 million and has the potential to increase this trade to \$1 billion in the coming years. It is impor-

tant to recognize the importance of our bilateral relations, especially in the context of our history, there are events between the two countries that touch the heart. In 1952, the Government of Pakistan opened its embassy at night and issued a Pakistani passport to Ahmed Balafrej who was issued a Pakistani Diplomatic passport in 1952 to claim the independence of Morocco from the seat of Pakistan at UNGA. He was appointed MOFA on April 1956

by Late His Majesty King Mohammed V and then by Late His Majesty Hassan II in 1962. From 1963 to 1972 he was the personal representative of King. He was the second Prime Minister between 12 May 1958 till 2 December 1958. In 1956, Morocco was liberated from France and he became the Prime Minister of Morocco. Morocco still keeps copies of this passport as an important memento, and proudly shares it with us. Pakistan Maroc Phosphorus

(OCP) is a joint venture between Morocco and FFBL. It manufactures phosphoric acid for export to Pakistan to meet our fertilizer needs with an investment of US\$ 400 million from Pakistan. We are planning to visit Morocco in April 2025 and are in the process of finalizing the agenda with our counterpart. The Pakistan-Morocco Parliamentary Friendship Group will continue to play an important role in enhancing communication and promoting deeper bilateral relations.

Call to establish long-term, sustainable policies

DNA

ISLAMABAD - The government needs to establish long-term and sustainable policies in consultation with the real stakeholders to enhance exports, increasing foreign exchange earnings for the country. Presently, the high cost of doing business has proved to be dangerous for the export-oriented apparel industry, as the ever-increasing energy, gas and power tariffs are the real threat to the economy amidst high markup rate and continuous fluctuations exchange rate. This was stated in a meeting jointly organized by Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association here on Sunday. The participants of the meeting asked the government to take prompt measures to bring down the production costs for the export industry to enable them

to compete in the international market. PHMA North Zone Chairman Abdul Hameed said that the export industry is currently having difficulty to compete the global market because of rapid increase in production costs. He said that the high cost of production is not good for our exports. Abdul Hameed said that high energy tariffs, growing rates of taxes, and lack of skilled labor are the main reasons behind the increase in the cost of production. Manufacturing and production industries have the potential to significantly impact economic growth by reducing unemployment in the country. "We are the biggest employment generators and largest exporters, contributing two-third of textile exports and one-third of country's total exports. The apparel sector has an immense potential to create jobs with comparatively low investment and less energy needs, as it generates four times the employment at one-fourth

of the energy consumption compared to other textile sectors." The chairman said that Pakistan's industry is struggling in the international market due to challenges such as high inflation, political instability, increased power tariff, rising fuel costs, energy shortages, and lack of R&D. An effective strategy is needed to improve the performance of the industrial sector. The government should facilitate exporters by providing a level playing field to them in terms of business costs, particularly in utility pricing, he suggested. He said Pakistan's economy, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), is struggling to cope with the current economic crunch, and needs support. Rather than providing subsidies or waivers, the industries are being burdened through rising production cost. The burden of surging oil prices in the international market is immediately transferred to consumers

by the government, but the process of reducing prices is always very slow, he noted. The meeting was attended by PHMA North Zone Chairman Abdul Hameed, Dr. Khurram Anwar Khawaja, Shahzad Saleem Asghar, Ashar Khurram, Shahid Butt, Dr. Khurram Tariq from PHMA and Ijaz Khokhar, Sohail Sheikh, Dr. Ayyazuddin, Sajid Saleem Minhas and Mubashar Naseer Butt from PRGMEA, besides the apparel industry's representatives from Lahore, Faisalabad and Sialkot. He asked the government to work on a fast track plan to address expansive energy issue and priority should be given to the value-added textile industry in this regard. The chairman urged for increasing ease of doing business, lowering cost of production, paying early refunds to solve liquidity crunch, relaxing import policy for industrial raw material, and equalizing the energy tariff across the country.

Foolproof security assured for Christmas gatherings

ISLAMABAD: Superintendent of Police (SP) Swan Zone, Pari Gul Traeen, on Sunday held a meeting with a delegation from the Christian community to discuss security measures for Christmas. During the meeting, SP Swan Zone assured the delegation that the Islamabad Capital territory (ICT) Police is taking all necessary steps to ensure the safety of the Christian community and their religious events, an official told. SP Gul Traeen emphasized that comprehensive security will continue to be provided for programs held at their places of worship. SP stated that the purpose of the meeting was to reassure the Christian community that ICT Police is always available for their security and considers itself accountable for their protection. She added that all churches in Islamabad are being provided with foolproof security. Additionally, SP Gul Traeen acknowledged the Christian community's cooperation with Islamabad Police and expressed hope for continued collaboration in the future. The Christian community delegation thanked SP Gul Traeen for addressing their concerns and ensuring full support for their security needs. They reaffirmed their commitment to standing with Islamabad Police at every level.—APP

Women's equal role in elections key to achieving lasting peace

ISLAMABAD: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja stated on Sunday that lasting peace and political stability, vital for national prosperity, can only be achieved through the equal participation of women, who make up nearly 50% of the population, in the electoral process. In his message on National Working Women's Day, observed on December 22, 2024, the CEC proudly acknowledged the invaluable contributions of Pakistani women in strengthening democracy. He said that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) remains dedicated to its constitutional mandate of conducting elections honestly, justly, and fairly. In recent years, we have made notable progress in overcoming the challenges faced by women as voters and candidates. The CEC stated that through focused efforts, the gender gap in electoral rolls has been reduced from over 11.7 percent in 2018 to 7.49 percent, a remarkable achievement within five years. He further noted that, encouragingly, more women than men were added to the electoral rolls during this period, with the goal of eliminating the gap entirely in the upcoming elections. The legal reform mandating political parties to allocate 5% of their tickets to women was a crucial step in enhancing women's representation as candidates. However, the CEC recognizes that further reforms and stricter accountability measures are necessary to ensure compliance and greater ticket reservation for women candidates. The CEC said ECP is committed to promoting inclusivity within its workforce by increasing the representation of women as staff and election officers, while ensuring a workplace free from discrimination and harassment. He also expressed pride in the fact that the CEC is one of the pioneering institutions in Pakistan and the Asia region to adopt Pakistan's first-ever "Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Framework.—DNA

Eight held in sheesha café raids in Islamabad

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police, continuing their "Nasha Ab Nahi" campaign, arrested eight individuals on Sunday in a crackdown against illegal Sheesha cafes in Gulberg Greens. The police recovered a large quantity of hookahs and flavors from the accused. A public relation officer told that ICT police Koral police intensified crackdown against the Sheesha centers in Gulberg Greens in order to eliminate this menace from the city and special efforts were also taken against the accused involved in immoral activities. In this regard, the Koral police station team apprehended 08 accused and recovered hookah and flavors from their possession. The arrested accused was also shifted to the police station for further legal proceedings.

Pucar-15' helpline ensures swift emergency response in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Police emergency helpline "Pucar-15" was playing a vital role in delivering timely services to citizens in case of emergency in the federal capital. The "Pucar-15" helpline received 1,37,621 calls in the previous month, providing guidance for 11,363 calls and registering 9,759 cases for immediate police assistance. Emergency teams were promptly dispatched for various types of calls and reports, according to a public relations officer told media. The "Pucar-15" call center was part of the Safe City initiative, where thousands of calls were received daily, and citizens were assisted according to the nature of the calls, including police, fire brigade, and ambulance services.—APP

Speakers highlights youth role in advancing Kashmir Cause

ISLAMABAD: The Friends of Kashmir (FOK) on Sunday organized a webinar titled "The Role of Youth in Advancing the Kashmir Cause." The event brought together prominent speakers, including Ghazala Habib (Chairperson, FOK), Abdul Hameed Lone (Vice Chairperson, FOK), Farzana Yaqoob Former Minister AJK, Dr. Khalid Aftab Sulhari (President, IHRO), Naila Altaf (Anchorperson), Nazneen Gillani (Chairperson, NUML Council), Dr. Mujahid Gillani (Kashmiri Leader), Waseem Younas (Chairman, NUML Council), Asim Zaib (Advocate), Shahzad Khan (Youth Council of Pakistan), Fareeha Adrees (Anchorperson), Shaista Safi (Youth Forum for Kashmir), and Waqar Hassan, said a press release. The session was moderated by Tayyaba Khurshid (Research Officer, CISSAJK) and Saadia Sattar (Youth Activist). The discussion emphasized the critical role of youth in advocating for the Kashmir cause through activism, social media platforms, educational reforms, and cultural preservation. It also highlighted the necessity

for informed engagement and strategic actions by young individuals to amplify the Kashmiri narrative. Speakers emphasized the importance of youth-led initiatives and representation in advancing the Kashmir cause. Nazneen Gillani stressed the potential of young leaders in driving the narrative and building global awareness. The establishment of youth councils and collaboration with international human rights organizations was proposed to strengthen advocacy efforts. Farzana Yaqoob, Former Minister AJK, emphasized the importance of naming and shaming Indian leaders and perpetrators involved in committing war crimes in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Highlighting the systematic human rights violations, she underscored the plight of innocent civilians, including the use of pellet guns, illegal detentions, and the denial of fundamental freedoms. She also urged the youth to actively raise awareness on international platforms, amplifying the voices of the oppressed and advocating for justice and accountability.

Naila Altaf and Fareeha Adrees highlighted the transformative power of social media in countering misinformation and amplifying the Kashmiri perspective. It was suggested that young individuals use platforms like X, Instagram, and YouTube to create impactful campaigns and raise global awareness. Dr. Khalid Aftab emphasized the importance of introducing Kashmir Studies at schools, colleges, and universities to educate youth about the region's history, culture, and political struggles. Academic institutions were encouraged to establish dedicated research centers for Kashmir-related studies. Ghazala Habib advocated for the establishment of language institutions to teach the Kashmiri language, highlighting its role in preserving cultural identity. The promotion of Kashmiri art, literature, and traditions was discussed as a means to sustain the region's cultural heritage. Dr. Mujahid Gillani and Shahzad Khan emphasized the need for a broader understanding of the Kashmir issue as a humanitarian and cultural crisis rather than merely a political conflict.—DNA

Briefs

Annual canals closure to kick off from Dec 26: Spokesman IRSA

ISLAMABAD: The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) has decided to close down canals for annual maintenance and desilting from December 26 to January 30, 2025 during Rabi season 2024-25. Sharing the details Director Operation and Spokesman IRSA Khalid Idrees Rana told APP here Sunday the Mangla command canals would be closed from Dec 26 till January 13 in stage-wise and Tarbela command canals would remain closed from January 13 to 30, 2025 while Sindh from December 26 to January 20, 2025. Under the canal closure programme, the said Punjab's lower Jhelum and Rasul Qadirabad Link would remain closed from Dec 26 to Jan 12 while Qadirabad Baloki Link from Dec 29 to Jan 15, central Bari Doab canals from Dec 27 to Jan 13 and Lower Bari Doab, Baloki, Sulemanki Link from Dec 29 to Jan 15. Similarly, Upper Pakpattan canal and Eastern Siddiqia Canal would remain closed from Dec 30 to Jan 16, while Upper Jhelum canal from Jan 12 to 29 and Lower Chenab Canal (except Jhang branch), Upper Bahawal Canal from Jan 13 to 30. Jhang Branch Canal to close from Dec 27 to Jan 13, while Upper Bahawal from January 13 to 30, 2025. Likewise, Khalid Rana told that Tarbela command canals Thal and Lower Bahawal canals would be closed from January 13 to 30, 2025, while Trimmu canal and Trimmu Sidhnai would remain closed from Jan 10 to Jan 27, while SMB Link canal and Sidhnai canal from Jan 11 to Jan 28, Lower Pakpattan canal from Jan 12 to Jan 29, and Lower Bahawal from Jan 13 to Jan 30. Regarding canals in Sindh, he told APP that Sindh's Kotri barrage would remain closed from Dec 26 to Jan 10, 2025, and Sukkur barrage from Jan 6 to Jan 20, 2025. According to the water discharge plan, the authority would release 10,000 to 12,000 cuses of water from Tarbela Dam and 8,000 cuses from Mangla Dam to meet drinking water requirements.—APP

Inflation rate at lowest level in six years: Kayani

ISLAMABAD: Convener Parliamentary Task Force SDGs Bilal Azhar Kayani has said the country is moving towards improvement at the economic front and the rate of inflation has come down to the lowest level in the last six years. He said the PTI always unveiled the plaques only and made claims that the country was moving towards improvement. Addressing a press conference, Kayani said reforms in the FBR and other measures were underway, and this journey of economic improvement of the country would continue. He said the federal government and the Punjab government were continuing their journey of public service. He said that the Punjab chief minister was launching project every other day, adding that Maryam Nawaz did outstanding work in the health sector. He said the government that continued from 2018 to 2022 caused a lot of damage to the country. He said that on the economic front, the country was moving towards improvement, while the policy rate had been significantly reduced.—APP

Chinese firms help Pak engineers to develop professional skills

In 2017, I was selected for a 4-month Chinese language course which proved as a turning point for me. I passed HSK-3 from Shandong Normal University, and was soon employed by CRCC in Islamabad in 2018

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Work experience with Chinese companies in Pakistan empowers the local engineering professionals to get better employment opportunities overseas, either with Chinese or other companies. Pakistani engineers not only have an opportunity to learn advanced engineering technologies; but also have a chance of global exposure due to the worldwide presence of Chinese firms. A few such Pakistani professionals who are now working in Saudi Arabia after getting

experience with the Chinese companies in Pakistan, Gwadar Pro reported on Sunday. Kashif Waheed, a Geotechnical Engineer with China State Construction Engineering Corp. at Mountain Running Tunnel Project, Neom, worked with China Ghezouba Group and Power China at the Balakot and Jabonri Hydropower projects in KP province. Eng. Zeenat Ullah worked with the China Railway Construction Corp. (CRCC) as Business Development Engineer in Pakistan. Later, he switched to government sector in 2018. In 2022, he shifted

to Saudi Arabia and was again employed by CRCC as Tunnel Engineer at NEOM. "Now I work for the NEOM client, but I am ready to switch to CRCC whenever there is an opportunity due to rich company culture and huge opportunities of professional development in Chinese firms", Eng. Zeenat told Gwadar Pro. Zeenat said that the tunnel engineers who worked with Chinese firms on hydropower projects in Pakistan availed exceptional opportunities with the Chinese companies operating in NEOM. Waqar Mehmood, who

did B.S. Electronics from Islamia College University, Peshawar told Gwadar Pro that how a little exposure to China played a huge role in achieving his career goals. "In 2017, I was selected for a 4-month Chinese language course which proved as a turning point for me. I passed HSK-3 from Shandong Normal University, and was soon employed by CRCC in Islamabad in 2018. The same year, I got a scholarship under which I did MS in Engineering Management from Shandong University of Finance and Economics. Upon return, I was de-

ployed by CRCC for 4 months at their Lusail Stadium project in Qatar. In September 2022, CRCC posted me at their NEOM project as Site Engineer, where I worked at Workers Welfare and Procurement departments as well. Now I am waiting for appointment as Procurement Manager with CRCC at their Diriyah Gate-2 project in Riyadh", Waqar said. Waqar said that his batchmates who got a chance to work with Chinese companies are also working at prestigious positions with Chinese or other companies. Several of our other batch fellows are also studying or working in China, he said.

China and Pakistan share latest non-wood forestry findings

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chinese and Pakistani academic achievements in resistant rootstocks for economic forests and grafted and fodder plants were exchanged at the just finished 4th China-Pakistan Tropical Arid Non-wood Forest Science & Technology Exchange Conference.

Over 500 professionals from China and Pakistan attended the conference simultaneously in Zhengzhou and Gwadar, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Sunday.

Starting from 2021, in the Belt and Road Engineering Research Center for Tropical Arid Non-wood Forest, professionals from the Chinese Society of Forestry, Central South University of Forestry and Technology, China Overseas Ports Holding Company Limited, Yulin Holding Company Limited, University of Karachi, University of Agriculture Faisalabad, and Indus University, etc. are working together on germplasm resource collection and new variety breeding and improved variety seedling propagation. They have also been engaged in cultivation and demonstration of drought-tolerant and infertile-tolerant economic plants, and technical training. Supported by the center, a tissue culture laboratory and a seedling nursery have been built in Gwadar, integrating China's advanced economic forestry technology with Pakistan's local conditions.

ITP fines over 56,000 bikers for helmet violations

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has issued over 56,000 fine tickets to motorcyclists for riding without helmets during the ongoing year. A police spokesperson told APP on Sunday that the ITP strives to maintain an exemplary traffic system in the city while ensuring strict action against negligence on the roads. All officers have been directed to enforce traffic rules and regulations without discrimination, demonstrating patience and politeness when issuing tickets to violators, he said. He added that the ITP is utilizing all available resources to facilitate the public on the capital's roads and has urged parents not to permit underage children to drive bikes or cars before reaching maturity.—APP



ISLAMABAD: An artisan crafts and sell wooden benches on the roadside while displaying at G-8 in the Federal Capital.

FRIA wants special incentives for cash-strapped small industry

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) has asked the government to announce soft financing with very low interest rate and without any collateral for SMEs. The FRIA Chairman Shahbaz Aslam, in a meeting of industry representatives, stated that the constant increase in power tariffs on the pretext of fuel adjustment had increased electricity prices and added to the already high cost of trade and industry. Seeking comparable energy tariffs for domestic industries in order to capture the global market, he stated that due to high electric-

ity rates, power theft became rampant as the tariff was unaffordable to consumers. The meeting forwarded several recommendations so that the small industry could deal with the challenges posed by the present economic crisis, saying mere statements would not work unless solid measures are taken by the government, including a sizable reduction in fuel prices, bringing down key policy rate to single digit, regionally competitive energy rates and substantial cut in duties and taxes. Shahbaz Aslam said that it is unfortunate that the State Bank has several times introduced a financing scheme for Small

and Medium Enterprises, enabling them to get loans without collateral but it was never implemented in its true spirit. The scheme was launched to improve the SMEs' access to finances in collaboration with the government and aimed at enabling businesses that cannot offer security or collateral to access bank finance. The FRIA Chairman urged the central bank to announce a soft loan with a minimum markup rate, especially for SMEs to bail out their struggling businesses. He called for significant cuts in import duties and waiver of sales tax, income tax, and additional income taxes, which

are still being charged in this time of grave crisis. Shahbaz Aslam asked the government to take concrete steps to keep the industrial wheels running especially for SMEs, to save the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small industries. He said that to save the economy from the impacts of the slow growth, the government should announce special incentives for a cash-strapped small and medium industry, which represents more than 90% of around 3.2 million business enterprises in Pakistan, contributing 40% to GDP, employing more than 80% of non-agricultural workforce, and generating 25% of export earnings.

High cost of doing business dangerous for export-oriented industry

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) on Sunday called for finalization and then its early implementation of some export enhancement package, urging the government to rescue this vital sector of economy and get the relief package implemented in its true spirit for sustainability of country's exports. Capacity of the industry was mostly unutilized while overhead costs had increased which compelled the export sectors to think of alternatives, it maintained. PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol, in a statement here along with senior vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor

Chaudhary, said early implementation of an export package can help steer the exporting industry out of crisis. The government needs to establish a long-term and sustainable policies in consultation with the real stakeholders to enhance exports, increasing foreign exchange earnings for the country. Presently, the high cost of doing business has proved to be dangerous for the export-oriented industry, as the ever-increasing energy, gas and power tariffs are the real threat to the economy amidst high markup rate and continuous fluctuations exchange rate. They demanded the quarters concerned for initiating steps such as provision of uninterrupted energy supply to the industry to make Pakistani exports competitive in the international market,

besides evolving an export-led policy and availability of energy at regionally competitive prices for economic turnaround. The PIAF office-bearers mentioned that Pakistan's share in global market was shrinking and going to other countries and unit price of its products was decreasing thus resulting in reduced profitability for Pakistani exporters. Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary stated that textiles in general and the value-added sector in particular were becoming uncompetitive in international market. That was why export of Pakistani textile was not showing significant growth for the last few years while its competitors - Bangladesh, India, China and Vietnam were recording upward move in their exports, he cited. PIAF

office-bearers also stressed that the supply of power and gas should not be interrupted during winter as the export orders in hand had to be honoured. They asked the government to take prompt measures to bring down the production costs for the export industry to enable them to compete in the international market. Faheem Saigol said that the export industry is currently having difficulty to compete the global market because of rapid increase in production costs. He said that the high cost of production is not good for our exports. Nasrullah Mughal said that high energy tariffs, growing rates of taxes, and lack of skilled labor are the main reasons behind the increase in the cost of production.

PM praised for cracking down on tax cheats

The political chaos caused by unresolved tensions between the two sides is not likely to go away without a serious and meaningful conversation

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Business leader and former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, on Sunday lauded Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's decision to crack down on tax evaders. He said tax theft is common among the political and business elite, which has endangered both the nation's security and the level of living of the masses. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement issued here today that the dire situation can be reversed only if taxes are collected in a proper way for which administrative measures are necessary. He said that the PM has directed the relevant authorities to apprehend tax evaders and enforce tough penalties for noncompliance, which is necessary to improve revenue collection. He added that the Prime Minister is well aware of the use of technology to improve collection and has made it a top priority. The business leader said video analytics in the sugar industry would help stabilize prices, eradicate hoarding, and greatly enhance tax collection. Moreover, the PM has directed routine sugar stock monitoring to ensure a continuous supply chain and sugar availability at affordable prices for the public. The Premier also mandated strict measures to combat sugar mill underreporting and tax evasion, urged the quick adoption of video analytics in the cement and tobacco sectors, and directed the digitization of the entire value chain. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that Pakistan's economy is growing, and investors are profiting from effective government policies, exports and foreign exchange reserves are on the rise, interest rates are going down, and record investment is being recorded. He said that different nations and foreign investors are putting their faith in government initiatives, the government is keeping all of its commitments to the people, and all economic problems are being resolved. He said that the situation is improving rapidly, political unrest is receding, economic activities are picking up, and the masses will soon get relief. Mr. Butt said that the country has been gripped by constant political instability with a party calling for more protests against the government. The political chaos caused by unresolved tensions between the two sides is not likely to go away without a serious and meaningful conversation.

High remittances flow crucial in financing deficit

BMP, PIAF leader Anjum Nisar says if govt supports overseas they can play role in boosting economy

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's (FPCCI) Businessmen Panel (BMP) has said that remittances can help not only in financing the deficit in import payments but also in foreign debt repayments, suggesting the government to focus on structural reforms, which can revive Pakistan's economic growth with major focus on incentives for overseas Pakistanis workers. FPCCI former president, PIAF patron-in-chief and Busi-

nessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar has said that foreign remittances flows are crucial which can support the country's account balance amidst low volumes of foreign direct investment (FDI) and nominal growth of exports. He said that overseas Pakistanis living in Gulf should further be motivated to maintain an upward momentum in remittances, as they contributed more than 60 percent of the total inflows during last couple of months. The Businessmen Panel chairman said that Referring to the State Bank of Pakistan data, he re-

vealed that remittances in Pakistan from its overseas citizens skyrocketed to \$14.8 billion in the first five months of the financial year 2024-25, a massive 33.6% gain from the previous year, The News reported. The national economic recuperation patronised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans, a stable local currency, incentives extended by money exchangers and banks as well as boost in the skilled Pakistani workers' emigration helped in growth of the remittance influx. As per the data, close to one million skilled workers went

abroad in the last three years. Overseas Pakistanis remitted around \$2.9 billion in November - an increase of 29.1% year-over-year. Nevertheless, these remittances slashed by 5% month-on-month. The monetary inflows have averaged \$2.9 billion per month as yet. The State Bank of Pakistan's incentives and policies that have decreased illegal foreign exchange trading are the main causes of the increase in official remittance flows. Moreover, as global inflation declines, more money is being sent home by Pakistani migrants.



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Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti
Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 05 Issue: 311

Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

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Russia-Ukraine conflict

AS Europe gets used to the fact that President Donald Trump is returning to the White House, many are wondering what this means for the war in Ukraine and the future of NATO. Almost three years into the conflict, Russia's invasion of Ukraine remains the most consequential moment in transatlantic security since the Second World War. This has been a critical year for the war. In 2024, Russia made minor gains in Ukraine but at a high cost and made a record increase in airstrikes on Ukrainian cities. Meanwhile, Ukraine undertook a bold invasion of Russia's Kursk Oblast and started developing weapons that can hit targets hundreds of kilometers deep inside Russia. Finally, this was the year that North Korean ground troops entered the conflict on the side of Russia. In sum, it has been an eventful year in the conflict. After Ukraine's lackluster performance during its 2023 counteroffensive, few of its supporters held high hopes for a major operation this year. Instead, the focus of Ukraine's Western allies shifted to rearming, refitting and training the Ukrainian armed forces in preparation for further counteroffensive operations in 2025. This effort was complicated by political delays in the US Congress, which postponed crucial aid for months. By early 2024, the consequences of this delay were severe. When US aid finally passed in March, Ukraine was running low on air defense missiles, artillery shells and even basic ammunition for front-line soldiers. During a summer marked by small but tactically significant Russian gains, especially in the Donetsk region, Ukraine took advantage of newly arrived American assistance and launched an audacious invasion of Russia's Kursk Oblast. This operation was arguably the most surprising and consequential event of the war in 2024. It demonstrated that Ukraine could succeed on the battlefield when supplied with the necessary resources. The capture of Russian territory by Ukraine all but guarantees that the front lines cannot be "frozen" where they currently are in any future peace talks. Furthermore, Ukraine's incursion into Russian territory forced Moscow to divert resources and troops to defend Kursk, reducing the pressure on other parts of the front. In 2024, the war in Ukraine also became directly linked to East Asian security. Open-source intelligence had already confirmed that North Korea had supplied Russia with more than a million artillery shells and ballistic missiles. However, in the fall, Pyongyang escalated its involvement by sending about 10,000 troops to support Russia. This development, in turn, sparked renewed cooperation between Ukraine and South Korea, North Korea's long-time adversary. Meanwhile, Russia has intensified airstrikes on Ukrainian cities at a level not seen since the war began in 2022. Each month, thousands of drones and missiles are launched at Ukrainian targets, many hitting civilian infrastructure. These attacks have severely tested Ukraine's air defense capabilities, but Kyiv has so far mitigated the worst effects, thanks to ongoing Western support. Diplomatically, Ukraine faced disappointment at the NATO summit in Washington in July, which marked the alliance's 75th anniversary. Many hoped for a clear path to NATO membership, understanding that immediate accession was unrealistic while Kyiv remained at war with Russia. However, Ukraine received only vague promises of eventual membership without a concrete roadmap.

- Luke Coffey



442 days of resilience

ISRAEL has not ceased its extermination in all its oppressive forms against the innocent in the Gaza Strip for more than 442 days, indifferent and unconcerned. It harvests Palestinians—old and young, women and men—cold-bloodedly. Israel commits genocide in every sense of the word, even resorting to hunger and deprivation as deadly weapons against the innocents, hoping to find someone who will raise the white flag in despair. Israel attempts to whitewash its genocide before the world, yet it disregards all international and humanitarian agreements regarding war situations. It stands isolated in international forums, where the United Nations has unanimously called for an immediate halt to the genocide. However, Israel clings to unwavering American support to continue its dark mission of destroying stone, trees, and people. Writer and researcher Hamid Ashour confirmed that this operation is not a coincidence but results from previous decisions, showing their impact on the ground in both northern and southern Gaza. He added, "Hundreds of trucks are piled up along the crossings, with only dozens allowed in for months, a number that barely quenches the thirst of a city that the occupation knows well requires at least 400 trucks daily, according to United Nations estimates." In addition to the continuous policy of killing and extermination, which has claimed more than 45,000 martyrs and left over 10,000 missing and more than 110,000 injured according to health reports from Gaza, Israel has found no signs of defeat in Gaza. Thus, it has pursued a deliberate policy of starvation, which has severely exacerbated the humanitarian situation. People find nothing to eat, and if they do, it is blood-stained and exorbitantly priced. Observing the humanitarian situation in Gaza reveals signs of crisis in everything: no electricity, no water, no potable water, no transportation, no food, and no means of living. In short, life in Gaza is akin to death, yet the people remain and resist breaking. Journalist and writer Abdul Rahman Younis tells our correspondent that what is happening in the Gaza Strip resembles myths—a whole people being exterminated before the world's eyes, and the level of interaction remains disproportionate to the magnitude of the crime. He asserts that Israel, by continuing its killing and extermination, along with starvation and the oppression of people, is trying to obliterate their consciousness and push them to lose faith in resistance and its programs, hoping they will turn against the resistance and demand its surrender. He emphasizes that this is not happening despite the horror faced by the residents. The deliberate policy of starvation has exacerbated the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, especially after the complete destruction of the agricultural sector. The markets in Gaza are empty, and you can hardly find anything to eat. If you take a tour of the exhausted city's markets, you will see no vegetables or fruits, and no type of meat has been available for many months. Most of the residents are surviving on canned goods—just beans, peas, and fava beans. The situation has even affected children's bread, as flour has run out in households, with the price of a single bag of flour nearing \$250. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) said that the ongoing Israeli extermination war on Gaza has destroyed more than two-thirds of the agricultural land in the Strip, "increasing the risk of famine among the population."

US Sanctions Pakistan Over Missiles Program

Qamar Bashir



Finally, the broader Indo-Pacific strategy also factors into U.S. concerns. Although Pakistan is not the primary focus, its growing missile capabilities indirectly affect regional security dynamics, especially with China's influence in the background. In this context, Pakistan's missile program is viewed as a destabilizing force with implications far beyond its immediate neighborhood, affecting U.S. strategic, economic, and military interests. The United States has imposed a series of sanctions targeting Pakistan's ballistic missile program...

ON December 19, 2024, Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer expressed concerns about Pakistan's development of long-range ballistic missile capabilities, stating that such advancements could enable Pakistan to strike targets beyond South Asia, including the United States. Finer described this progression as an "emerging threat" to the U.S. In response to these developments, the U.S. government imposed sanctions on entities involved in Pakistan's missile program, including the National Development Complex. These sanctions aim to impede further advancements in missile technology that could threaten regional and global security. Pakistan's current missile systems, including its longest-range Shaheen-III with a range of 2,750 km, cannot reach the United States, which is over 12,000 km away. The missile arsenal includes the Hatf-I, with a range of 70 km and a payload capacity of 500 kg, and the Nasr (Hatf-9), a tactical nuclear-capable missile with a range of 60-70 km. Additionally, the Shaheen-II and Shaheen-III medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) have respective ranges of 2,500 km and 2,750 km. However, none of these systems are capable of covering the vast distance required to target the U.S. mainland. Interestingly, it is difficult to comprehend why the U.S., with its vastly superior and highly sophisticated missile systems and formidable military might—far exceeding the combined capabilities of the rest of the world—perceives Pakistan's missile program as a potential long-term threat. The US's concern most probably stems from the progression of Pakistan's missile technology, which demonstrates increasing sophistication and could eventually lead to the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Additionally, the U.S. is apprehensive about the dual-use nature of these missiles—capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear warheads—which could exacerbate tensions in South Asia and destabilize regional security, a region critical to U.S. strategic interests. Another significant perceived concern could be the risk of missile technology proliferation to countries hostile to the US or it could have stemmed from US's misconceived notion that this technology or expertise could fall into the hands of non-state actors hostile to U.S. interests. Moreover, while Pakistan's missiles cannot currently target the U.S., their deployment in regional or third-party conflicts, or their

potential transfer to allies or adversaries, could directly impact U.S. forces or allies. The US's fears may be due to its perceived risks to U.S. interests in South Asia, the Middle East, and the broader Indo-Pacific region. In South Asia, Pakistan's missile arsenal, particularly its nuclear-capable systems, contributes to heightened tensions with India. This nuclear rivalry increases the risk of an arms race and potential conflicts that could destabilize the region. Given the U.S.'s strong economic and strategic ties to India, and its role as a promoter of regional stability, any disruption in South Asia could directly impact American interests. In the Middle East, the reach of Pakistan's Shaheen-III missile, which extends to parts of the region, raises concerns for U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Israel. The possibility of missile proliferation or use by Pakistan or its proxies could endanger U.S. military operations and vital interests such as energy security. Furthermore, the Indian Ocean, a critical trade and strategic route, is another area of concern. Pakistan's development of naval and submarine-based platforms for missile deployment poses a potential threat to maritime security, including U.S. naval operations and those of its allies. Finally, the broader Indo-Pacific strategy also factors into U.S. concerns. Although Pakistan is not the primary focus, its growing missile capabilities indirectly affect regional security dynamics, especially with China's influence in the background. In this context, Pakistan's missile program is viewed as a destabilizing force with implications far beyond its immediate neighborhood, affecting U.S. strategic, economic, and military interests. The United States has imposed a series of sanctions targeting Pakistan's ballistic missile program, aiming to curb its development and proliferation. In December 2024, the U.S. sanctioned Pakistan's state-owned National Development Complex (NDC) and three Karachi-based companies—Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, Affiliates International, and Rockside Enterprise—for their involvement in advancing Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile capabilities, particularly the Shaheen series. These sanctions freeze any U.S. assets belonging to the targeted entities and prohibit American individuals and businesses from engaging in transactions with them. Earlier, in September 2024, the U.S. The State Department sanctioned the Beijing Research Institute

of Automation for Machine Building Industry and several Chinese firms for supplying equipment to Pakistan's missile program, specifically for testing rocket motors for the Shaheen-3 and Ababeel systems. Looking ahead, the U.S. may consider additional measures to further impede Pakistan's missile development. Potential actions could include expanding sanctions to encompass a broader range of entities and individuals involved in the program, increasing diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to halt its missile advancements, and enhancing collaboration with international partners to restrict the transfer of missile-related technologies to Pakistan. Such measures would aim to reinforce non-proliferation norms and address the security concerns associated with the expansion of Pakistan's missile capabilities. Given the context of U.S. concerns over Pakistan's missile capabilities and the sanctions imposed, it is likely that future measures will aim to balance strategic objectives with maintaining bilateral relations. The U.S. has significant interests in preventing missile proliferation and ensuring regional stability but also recognizes the fragility of Pakistan's economy and its geopolitical importance, especially in South Asia. Sanctions are likely to remain targeted, focusing on specific entities and individuals directly involved in Pakistan's missile program, such as manufacturers, suppliers, and research institutions. This approach would allow the U.S. to address its security concerns without severely impacting Pakistan's broader economy or bilateral ties. The U.S. is unlikely to pursue blanket sanctions that could destabilize Pakistan's already fragile economic situation, as this could inadvertently exacerbate regional instability and complicate U.S. efforts to engage with Pakistan on counterterrorism, regional security, and other shared interests. By confining sanctions to missile-related entities and technologies, the U.S. can exert pressure on Pakistan's missile program while leaving room for diplomatic engagement. This approach reflects a careful balancing act—addressing missile proliferation risks without jeopardizing the broader U.S.-Pakistan relationship, which includes cooperation on counterterrorism, regional diplomacy, and maintaining stability in South Asia.

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Saudi Arabia and United States military recalibration

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The Middle East's complex security environment necessitates a recalibration of defense policies. Persistent challenges such as Iran's nuclear ambitions, proxy conflicts in Yemen, and instability in Syria underscore the need for a pragmatic security strategy. By opting for a limited military agreement, Saudi Arabia may be positioning itself to engage in more flexible and less binding security arrangements, enabling it to pursue peace initiatives...

THE recent recalibration of Saudi Arabia's military cooperation with the United States marks a significant turning point in the strategic dynamics of the Middle East. Historically, Saudi Arabia has maintained a robust defense relationship with Washington, underpinned by extensive arms sales, joint military exercises, and intelligence-sharing agreements. However, Riyadh's decision to pursue a more constrained military cooperation framework instead of a comprehensive defense pact highlights shifting geopolitical priorities influenced by both regional and global strategic calculations. Saudi Arabia and the United States have enjoyed decades of strategic partnership rooted in mutual security and economic interests. Since the 1945 meeting between King Abdulaziz and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the two nations have collaborated on ensuring energy security and countering regional threats, particularly from Iran. Over the years, the U.S. has supplied Saudi Arabia with advanced military hardware, including fighter jets, missile defense systems, and cutting-edge surveillance technology, making Saudi Arabia one of the largest defense buyers globally. The decision to scale down defense cooperation reflects evolving security concerns and Riyadh's strategic reorientation. Several factors contribute to this adjustment, including perceived U.S. disengagement from the Middle East, growing multipolarity in global politics, and the kingdom's desire for strategic autonomy. The U.S.'s pivot toward the Indo-Pacific and reduced military presence in the Middle East may have prompted Saudi

leaders to diversify their defense partnerships and reduce dependency on a single ally. Additionally, Saudi Arabia's leadership appears keen on recalibrating its foreign policy to reflect greater independence. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 agenda emphasizes economic diversification and international diplomacy beyond military reliance. Strengthening ties with emerging powers such as China and Russia suggests Riyadh's intent to balance its external relations. The Middle East's complex security environment necessitates a recalibration of defense policies. Persistent challenges such as Iran's nuclear ambitions, proxy conflicts in Yemen, and instability in Syria underscore the need for a pragmatic security strategy. By opting for a limited military agreement, Saudi Arabia may be positioning itself to engage in more flexible and less binding security arrangements, enabling it to pursue peace initiatives while retaining military readiness. Moreover, the thawing of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, facilitated by China's mediation, reflects a broader attempt at regional stabilization. A less entangled military pact with the U.S. could facilitate diplomatic engagements without appearing confrontational toward Tehran. The redefined U.S.-Saudi defense cooperation also reflects the broader global power struggle. As the United States prioritizes countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, Saudi Arabia appears to be recalibrating its alliances to ensure continued strategic relevance. This includes exploring defense partnerships with European nations and strengthening ties with emerging defense suppliers. Simultaneously,

Washington faces the challenge of managing this realignment while safeguarding its geopolitical interests in the region. Maintaining a security foothold in the Gulf remains essential for the U.S. to secure global energy supplies and contain adversarial powers. Looking ahead, the evolving U.S.-Saudi military cooperation is likely to be characterized by transactional engagements focused on specific threats such as terrorism, maritime security, and missile defense. Joint counterterrorism efforts and intelligence sharing will likely persist given their mutual interest in combating extremist threats. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's continued investment in domestic defense capabilities aligns with its broader strategy of reducing external reliance. The kingdom's ambition to develop indigenous military technology through state-owned entities like Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI) underscores its commitment to self-sufficiency. Saudi Arabia's recalibrated defense strategy reflects a nuanced response to an evolving international order. While the reduction in defense commitments with the United States may appear as a strategic downgrading, it signals Riyadh's pursuit of a more balanced and diversified foreign policy. This development highlights the kingdom's intent to assert greater strategic autonomy while navigating a multipolar global environment where traditional alliances are no longer absolute. As the geopolitical landscape continues to shift, both Riyadh and Washington must adapt to maintain a partnership that aligns with their respective security and economic priorities.

Briefs

Body formed to negotiate with the PTI

FROM PAGE 01
comprising leaders from PTI – to engage with the government, had already been formed by the PTI founder Imran Khan weeks ago, which reflects the party's realisation that the policy of confrontation could not be continued indefinitely. The prime minister, on the other hand, formed the negotiating body on recommendation of National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq. Admiring Sadiq for his efforts in this regard, the prime minister expressed the hope that the national security and interest would be prioritised during the course of prospected negotiations. "Our existence hinges on Pakistan's existence," PM Shehbaz said. The development comes less than a day after the NA speaker confirmed reaching out to the premier for the formation of the dialogue committee, after assuring PTI of playing a role in mediation, which accused the government of not being serious about negotiations. "I accept Barrister Gohar Khan's proposal to form a negotiation committee," he said.

PTI hails formation of negotiation..

FROM PAGE 01
adding that the dialogue must progress positively considering the sensitivity of the situation. In a telephonic conversation with a private news channel, the leader of the Opposition in NA Omar Ayub Khan said that while PTI's demands have already been presented before the government, the party will consider any formal request that is put forward from the other side. He, however, stressed that the seriousness of the government's approach to negotiations would need to be evaluated. When asked about his stance on the negotiation committee, Ayub said: "Our demands have already been presented to the government. If they make a formal request, we will consider it." He added that the seriousness of the government's approach to negotiations would need to be evaluated.

Pak Army determined to eliminate..

FROM PAGE 01
the martyrs were the pride of Pakistan, and their sacrifices will never be forgotten. Gen Munir highlighted that the courage, resilience, and unyielding determination of Pakistan's Armed Forces were the "cornerstone of the nation's sovereignty". He described the soldiers of the armed forces and LEAs as the "true heroes of the nation, whose bravery and selfless dedication inspire the entire country." He reaffirmed the Pakistan Army's commitment to pursuing TTP, now known as Fitna Al Khawarij, and should continue to be hunted down till its elimination along with the "facilitator, abettors and financier who will be made to pay the price for their nefarious activities against the state."

Polio vaccination made...

FROM PAGE 01
According to the notification issued by the deputy commissioner, a verification certificate from the district health office confirming polio vaccination is now mandatory in seven tehsils of Peshawar for obtaining birth, marriage and death certificates. Officials state that this step has been taken to ensure compliance from parents who refuse to vaccinate their children against polio. Authorities reveal that several areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa still face resistance from parents regarding polio vaccination. Earlier, PM Shehbaz Sharif launched the anti-polio drive by administering polio drops to children under five years of age, emphasizing the government's commitment to completely eradicate polio virus from Pakistan.

Oleksandr Usyk downs Fury to retain world heavyweight titles

'I win, it's good ... I'm not the judges, I'm a sportsman, I'm an athlete,' says Usyk

SPORTS DESK

RIYADH: Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk retained his WBA (Super), WBO and WBC world heavyweight titles by unanimous decision against Britain's Tyson Fury to remain undefeated after an enthralling clash in an electric atmosphere at the Kingdom Arena on Saturday. Giving up advantages in height, weight and reach to his much bigger opponent, Usyk fought superbly throughout to win 116-112 on all three judges' scorecards as he again defeated Fury after his success in May made him the undisputed champion. Fury, 36, was much-improved from that first encounter where he wilted in the ninth round but could still not solve the puzzle posed by the 37-year-old Usyk, whose superb movement saw him force the Briton onto the back foot for much of the bout. Tipping the scales at a career-high 281 pounds (127kg), 55 pounds (25kg) heavier than Usyk, Fury started at a high tempo and tried to control the centre of the ring using his jab, but the Ukrainian matched him and tried back



and by the seventh he slowed, moving to southpaw late in the round as he struggled with fatigue. Tyson Fury's reliance on hard shots in ones and twos to the body did little to stop Usyk from marching forward, usually finishing his flurries with his fearsome left hand. A good start to the 10th by Fury did not last and Usyk was soon back controlling the angles, finishing the frame at a

furious pace and coasting through the final two rounds to take a convincing victory. Asked in his post-fight interview in the ring if he thought the scorecards were correct, Oleksandr Usyk shrugged. "I win, it's good ... I'm not the judges, I'm a sportsman, I'm an athlete," Usyk said, before praising his sons who he said had been involved in judo competitions earlier on Saturday. Usyk was called out in the ring by Britain's Daniel Dubois, who he beat with a ninth-round stoppage in controversial circumstances in August 2023 after a fifth-round knockdown of Usyk was ruled to have been a low blow. Disappointed by the second loss of his professional career, the usually talkative Fury left the ring without doing an interview, leaving his promoter Frank Warren to speak on his behalf and express disbelief at the scoring. "How can Tyson only get four rounds in this fight? It's impossible," Warren said, adding he thought Fury had won. "He's very disappointed, as I am as well. But, I mean, I'm not saying there's any bias (on my part). Everybody along the front there, we all thought the same way."

Atletico grab winner to go top of La Liga

Barcelona held a 10-point lead over Atletico in early November, but a poor run of form, and a string of wins for Diego Simeone's side, have seen Atletico overhaul their rivals



BARCELONA: Substitute Alexander Sorloth scored an injury-time winner as Atletico Madrid fought back against Barcelona to replace them at the top of La Liga. Pedri opened the scoring for Barcelona in the 30th minute, linking up with fellow Spain midfielder Gavi before slotting a low strike past Jan Oblak. Despite their dominance, the hosts couldn't hold on and Rodrigo De Paul hammered home the equaliser on the hour mark after leaping on a

mistake from Marc Casado. Barcelona were left to rue more missed chances when Sorloth slammed in Nahuel Molina's cross in the sixth minute of injury time to give Atletico their 12th straight win in all competitions. The victory means Atletico will end 2024 as the top team in Spain, three points above Barcelona, who have played a game more. Hansi Flick's Barca side could slip to third if Real Madrid beat

Sevilla on Sunday. Barcelona held a 10-point lead over Atletico in early November, but a poor run of form, and a string of wins for Diego Simeone's side, have seen Atletico overhaul their rivals. Atletico arrived at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis level on points with their hosts, knowing a victory would see them enter 2025 as La Liga leaders. They were second best for most of the evening evening and were forced to weather a storm of Barcelona attacks throughout. Gavi should

Zheng to skip United Cup, stay fresh for AO
The Australian Open will begin on January 12

WEB DESK

Sydney: Australian Open runner-up Zheng Qinwen will kick off her 2025 season at the Grand Slam next month after deciding to skip the United Cup mixed team tournament starting this week, the 22-year-old said. Zheng was beaten in the final of the year's first major by Aryna Sabalenka in January but enjoyed a successful campaign, claiming the Paris Olympics gold medal and WTA Tour titles in Tokyo and Palermo. The Chinese player, who was runner-up at the Wuhan Open and the WTA Finals, competed in 68 matches this season. "After the long season that 2024 was for me, I need a few extra weeks of rest, recovery, and good training to get ready for the new season," Zheng said on Instagram. "I had such a fantastic time at the United Cup in January of this year, and therefore will miss the event greatly. "Still, I'm so excited to be back in Australia soon and I will see you all in Melbourne in a couple of weeks."

Joe Root returns as England announce squad for CT-2024

All-rounder Stokes fails to secure a spot due to an injury

WEB DESK

LONDON: Experienced top-order batter Joe Root returned as the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Sunday, announced a 15-member squad for the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025, set to be hosted by Pakistan in the February-March window. Root, who is a regular part of England's Test side, has not featured in the shorter format since the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023. The right-handed batter had an average outing in the mega event as he accumulated 276 runs in nine innings at an average of 30.66, including three half-centuries. Besides him, white-ball captain Jos Buttler also made his return to the ODI side since England's lacklustre campaign in the mega event. Meanwhile, dynamic all-rounder Ben Stokes was not considered for selection due to a hamstring injury, which he sustained during the third Test of the recently-concluded away series against New Zealand. Notably, prior to the eight-team tournament, the squad will tour India for a three-match each T20I and ODI series. The T20I series is scheduled to run from January 22 to 28, followed by three crucial ODIs, set to take place on February 6, 9

and 12, respectively. Left-arm pacer Reece Topley, along with all-rounders Sam Curran and Will Jacks were the notable absentees from both squads. England squad for T20 series in India: Jos Buttler (c), Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark Wood.



The race for telecom supremacy in Pakistan

DNA

IN Pakistan's dynamic telecom landscape, Jazz, CMPak (operating as Zong), and Ufone are in a continuous race for market leadership. Their strategies encompass network expansion, service diversification, and digital innovation, with cloud adoption playing a pivotal role in enhancing operational efficiency and delivering advanced services. Jazz, the country's largest telecom operator, boasts a subscriber base of over 71 million and a commanding market share of 37%. Its commitment to digital transformation is evident in substantial investments, such as the PKR 37 billion allocated in 2023 for expanding data infrastructure and supporting digital ecosystems. The launch of its cloud platform, Garaj, underscores Jazz's strategic vision, providing state-of-the-art cloud services tailored to local businesses and enabling enterprises to adopt scalable solutions while maintaining data sovereignty. CMPak, better known as Zong, has consistently been a pioneer in technological innovation, introducing 4G to Pakistan and aggressively expanding its network.

Backed by China Mobile, Zong has the financial muscle and technological expertise to stay competitive. Its investments in network upgrades and spectrum acquisitions reflect a focus on enhancing service quality. Notably, Zong has established a strategic partnership with Huawei to drive digital transformation. This collaboration integrates Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data, enabling Zong to offer seamless connectivity and digitally enhanced solutions to its customers. Ufone, a subsidiary of PTCL, is leveraging its parent company's extensive infrastructure to enhance its service offerings. The recent announcement of a merger with Telenor Pakistan promises significant synergies, combining the strengths of both operators to create a more robust network and improved customer services. Ufone's integration with PTCL's cloud and data center capabilities offers a strategic advantage, enabling the development of new digital solutions and expansion into underserved areas. Additionally, Ufone has introduced 'Ucloud,' a cloud storage service that allows users to store and access data remotely, reflecting its commitment to providing digital solutions to its customer base.

Cloud adoption is emerging as a decisive factor in this competition. The ability to deploy scalable, efficient, and innovative solutions through cloud platforms is essential for addressing customer needs, enhancing network operations, and supporting emerging technologies like IoT and 5G. Jazz's early and aggressive investment in cloud infrastructure, coupled with its holistic approach to digital transformation, gives it a significant edge. Platforms like Garaj and partnerships with leading global tech providers position Jazz to sustain its market dominance and lead in areas like AI-driven services and data analytics. For Zong to take up the challenge and emerge as a stronger contender, it must further solidify its cloud strategy by investing in local data centers and expanding partnerships with global cloud providers. Leveraging its existing collaboration with Huawei, Zong should prioritize developing scalable IoT solutions and AI-driven services, focusing on sectors like smart cities, industrial IoT, and consumer applications. A comprehensive cloud adoption plan will enable Zong to improve operational efficiency and enhance its service portfolio,

providing a competitive edge. Ufone must accelerate its digital transformation by fully utilizing PTCL's extensive infrastructure and cloud capabilities. With the upcoming merger with Telenor Pakistan, Ufone should focus on integrating and optimizing network resources to provide superior coverage and service quality. Investing in developing localized cloud solutions tailored to SMEs and enterprises, particularly in underserved regions, will be crucial. Partnering with cost-effective and scalable cloud providers could enable Ufone to offer innovative solutions in healthcare, education, and agriculture, aligning with the country's broader development goals. As 2024 approaches, Jazz appears to be the clear frontrunner in the race for telecom superiority in Pakistan. Its comprehensive strategy, encompassing robust cloud adoption, significant infrastructure investments, and a focus on digital innovation, sets it apart from competitors. While Zong and Ufone have the potential to challenge Jazz's dominance, they must adopt aggressive cloud strategies, focus on emerging technologies, and expand their service offerings to gain momentum in this highly competitive landscape.

Naqvi briefs PM about...

FROM PAGE 01

The prime minister on this occasion expressed his satisfaction at the measures taken for maintenance of law and order in the country.

AC not to pronounce verdict today

FROM PAGE 01

next hearing date for the case will be provided tomorrow at the accountability court in Sector G-11. It is anticipated that on the newly announced date, the court may issue its verdict regarding the reference filed against Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi.

Omar Ayub Criticises military...

FROM PAGE 01

citing the example of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), which received a bid of only PKR 10 billion instead of the expected PKR 85 billion. Ayub emphasised that former prime minister Imran Khan had formed a negotiation committee in good faith. While acknowledging the government's formation of a similar committee, he clarified that the PTI's committee had two primary demands: formation of a judicial commission to investigate the events of May 9 and November 26, and release of under trial political prisoners. He warned that if these demands were not met, the PTI would launch a civil disobedience movement.

PIA set for debt-free privatisation with IMF aid

FROM PAGE 01

This move will make PIA a more attractive and lucrative investment opportunity for potential buyers. The minister also expressed optimism about PIA's resumption of flights to Europe, calling it a major milestone. The restart of European operations signals improved credibility and paves the way for further expansions, including potential routes to the United Kingdom and the United States, he said. Khan assured that the privatisation process is moving swiftly, and he expects significant progress soon. He believes that handing over PIA to the private sector will restore its operational efficiency and market competitiveness. He welcomed the resumption of PIA flights to Europe, calling it a significant step toward restoring public confidence in the national flag carrier. "This is a very welcome development, as people are now confident they will soon be able to travel to Europe via PIA," he said. The minister said that this milestone would also strengthen the airline's privatisation prospects.

Yemeni army Announces downing...

FROM PAGE 01

Yahya Saree, in which he confirmed that the operation was carried out in conjunction with the start of the aggressive attack on Yemen yesterday evening. Earlier, The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) says a fighter aircraft was shot down over the Red Sea in what it claimed to be a case of "friendly fire", amid Washington's escalated aggression on Yemeni soil in support of the Israeli regime. The Armed Forces carried out the qualitative operation using 8 cruise missiles and 17 drones, and the operation resulted in the downing of an "F-18" aircraft while the destroyers were trying to confront the Yemeni drones and missiles. The forces indicated that most of the enemy warplanes left Yemeni airspace for international waters in the Red Sea to defend the aircraft carrier while it was being targeted. The Armed Forces reported that the aircraft carrier "USS Harry S. Truman" withdrew after being targeted from its previous location towards the northern Red Sea, after being subjected to more than one attack by the missile force, naval forces and the air force drone.

Briefs

Gaza medics struggle to rescue patients after Israel orders hospital evacuated

BEIT LAHIYA: Israel ordered the closure and evacuation on Sunday of one of the last hospitals still partly functioning in a besieged area on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip, forcing medics to search for a way to bring hundreds of patients and staff to safety. The head of the Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahiya, Husam Abu Safiya, told Reuters via text message that obeying the order to shut down was "next to impossible" because there were not enough ambulances to get patients out. "We currently have nearly 400 civilians inside the hospital, including babies in the neonatal unit, whose lives depend on oxygen and incubators. We cannot evacuate these patients safely without assistance, equipment, and time," said Abu Safiya. "We are sending this message under heavy bombardment and direct targeting of the fuel tanks, which if hit will cause a large explosion and mass casualties of the civilians inside," he said. The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment on Abu Safiya's remarks. On Friday it said it had sent fuel and food supplies to the hospital and helped evacuate more than 100 patients and caregivers to other Gaza hospitals, some in coordination with the Red Cross, for their own safety. The hospital is one of the only ones still partially functioning in the once crowded northern edge of Gaza, an area under intense Israeli military pressure for nearly three months in one of the most punishing operations of the 14-month-old war.—APP

Tunisia women herb harvesters struggle with drought, heat

TUNIS: On a hillside in Tunisia's northwestern highlands, women scour a sun-scorched field for the wild herbs they rely on for their livelihoods, but droughts and rising temperatures are making it ever harder to find the precious plants. Yet the harvesters say they have little choice but to struggle on, as there are few opportunities in a country hit hard by unemployment, inflation and high living costs. "There is a huge difference between the situation in the past and what we are living now," said Mabrouka Athimi, who heads a local collective of women herb harvesters named "Al Baraka" ("Blessing"). "We're earning half, sometimes just a third, of what we used to." Tunisia produces around 10,000 tonnes of aromatic and medicinal herbs each year, according to official figures. Rosemary accounts for more than 40% of essential oil exports, mainly destined for French and American markets.—APP

Diplomats attend grand Christmas cake cutting ceremony

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Cultural Forum and Secretary General of UBG, Zafar Bakhtawari, along with UBG Central Core Committee Member (FPCCI) and former ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, organized a grand Christmas event in honor of foreign ambassadors. The Chief Guest at the event was ICCI President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi. The event was attended by ambassadors, diplomats, and prominent personalities from various countries. The purpose of the event was to promote international relations and highlight harmony among different cultures. Prominent attendees included Khazar Farhadov, Ambassador of Azerbaijan; Ambassador of Tajikistan; Dr. Ehab Mohamed Abdel Hamid Hassan, Ambassador of Egypt; Rahmat Hindiarta, Charge d'Affaires of Indonesia; Fatima Hariri, Ambassador of Rwanda; Vona Han, Ambassador of Myanmar; Colonel Lutfullah, Deputy Head of Mission of Uzbekistan; and Augustine Christie Ruben, Charge d'Affaires of Sri Lanka. The British High Commission was represented by Alessandro. In his address, the Chief Guest, ICCI President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, stated that Christmas conveys a message of peace, prosperity, and brother-



hood for humanity. He emphasized that Pakistan has always sought friendship and cooperation with the international community. The presence of distinguished foreign guests at the event is a testament to the open-heartedness and warmth of the Pakistani people, who support harmony and unity on a global scale. Such events further strengthen these relations. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that Christmas not only spreads a message of love and

peace but also teaches us to set aside religious and cultural differences to celebrate happiness together. Zafar Bakhtawari added that the event exemplifies how people from diverse religions, cultures, and nationalities can come together to demonstrate love and solidarity. Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov, while sharing his thoughts, said that Pakistan and Azerbaijan have always maintained strong relations, and such events fur-

ther solidify these bonds. Yezhan Kistafin, Ambassador of Kazakhstan, remarked that this event is a beautiful example of the fusion of our shared civilizations. Pakistan has always been an important partner for us. Dr. Ehab Mohamed Abdel Hamid Hassan, Ambassador of Egypt, appreciated the hospitality of the Pakistani people and mentioned that this Christmas celebration has opened new avenues of friendship. At the

conclusion of the event, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari thanked all the guests and reiterated Pakistan's commitment to fostering friendly relations with countries worldwide. He conveyed a message of love and peace on the occasion of Christmas. The event featured traditional Christmas music, food, and cultural performances, which delighted the attendees. All the guests appreciated the event and expressed their gratitude to the hosts.

Veterinary Drug and Vaccine symposium 2024 kicks off in Beijing

ISLAMABAD: BRI Veterinary Drug and Vaccine Symposium 2024 kicked off in Beijing under the Advanced Workshop on Veterinary Drug and Vaccine Technology in BRI Countries, bringing together experts and policymakers from Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Iran, and other regional countries. Hosted by China Agricultural University, Chinese Veterinary Medical Association, and supported by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China, the event drew participants from other regional nations, creating a robust platform for collaborative innovation in veterinary science. The inaugural session, presided over by Prof. Cheng He, set the tone for a week of knowledge-sharing and strategic discussions. Opening addresses were delivered by distinguished representatives, including Liu Xiuli, Deputy Secretary General of the China Veterinary Medicine Association, Afifa Shajia, Education Attaché at the Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing, Zhang Bing, Chairman of the Shandong Binzhou Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine Academy, and Esmaeil Mehryar, Science and Technology Counselor at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The speakers highlighted the significance of fostering cross-border collaboration to advance veterinary drug and vaccine technology under the BRI framework. In her keynote address, Liu Xiuli emphasized China's strides in veterinary medicine and vaccine innovation, underscoring the importance of technology transfer and regional cooperation to combat zoonotic diseases and strengthen animal health systems. The inaugural session concluded with an insightful presentation by Ms. Liu on the development of the Chinese veterinary drug and vaccine industry, detailing the nation's advancements and its vision for global partnerships. Participants of the symposium are set to engage in a diverse program over the coming days, featuring technical training, interactive workshops, and site visits to state-of-the-art research facilities. Sessions will explore critical topics such as animal disease control, vaccine development, market strategies, and investment opportunities in livestock under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Highlights include presentations by renowned experts like Dr. Muhammad Mohsin Kiani, Sector Specialist of Livestock and Food Security from Pakistan, who will discuss investment prospects in the animal industry under CPEC, and Dr. Li Huachun, former Director of FAO-ASEAN Office, who will provide insights into disease prevalence and veterinary markets in the Mekong region. The symposium aims to facilitate the exchange of scientific knowledge and practical expertise among BRI nations, fostering innovation in veterinary drug and vaccine technologies. It also seeks to address critical challenges such as regulatory harmonization, capacity building, and market expansion, which are vital for ensuring sustainable livestock production and food security in the region. As part of the event, attendees will visit cutting-edge facilities, including the Beijing R&D Center of Zhao Fenghua Group and Inner Mongolia's Jin Yu Biotechnology Co., Ltd. These visits will offer firsthand insights into advanced vaccine production techniques and enable discussions on technology transfer and commercial partnerships.—DNA

Mosul airport to open in June, 11 years after Daesh capture

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani on Sunday ordered for the inauguration of the airport in second city Mosul to be held in June, marking 11 years since Islamists took over the city. On June 10, 2014, the Daesh group seized Mosul, declaring its "caliphate" from there 19 days later after capturing large swathes of Iraq and neighboring Syria. After years of fierce battles, Iraqi forces backed by a US-led international coalition dislodged the group from Mosul in July 2017, before declaring its defeat across the country at the end of that year. In a Sunday statement, Sudani's office said the premier directed during a visit there "for the airport's opening to be on June 10, coinciding with the anniversary of Mosul's occupation, as a message of defiance in the face of terrorism." Over 80 percent of the airport's runway and terminals have been completed, according to the statement. Mosul's airport had been completely destroyed in the fighting. In August 2022, then-prime minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi laid the foundation stone for the airport's reconstruction. Sudani's office also announced on Sunday the launch of a project to rehabilitate the western bank of the Tigris in Mosul, affirming that "Iraq is secure and stable and on the right path."—APP

Ayatollah Khamenei: Iran neither has nor needs proxy forces

TEHRAN: Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has dismissed claims that Iran has been cut off from its "proxy forces" in the region, asserting that the Islamic Republic neither has nor needs such forces to achieve its objectives. He made the remarks on Sunday during a meeting with a group of religious eulogists on the occasion of the birthday anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra (SA), the beloved daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Leader contended that the resistance fighters in Yemen, and groups such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad, are fighting because of their faith. "They (the enemies) consistently say that the Islamic Republic has lost its regional proxies—this is yet another mistake! The Islamic Republic does not have any proxy forces," Ayatollah Khamenei said. Resistance fighters, he explained, "are driven by their beliefs; they fight because of their convictions, not on our behalf." He also noted that should Iran ever decide to take action, it would not require a proxy force to do so. In regard to the situation in Syria, the Leader foresaw the emergence of a "strong and honorable establishment." The United States' plot to dominate countries involves establishing a dictatorship or fomenting chaos and riots, with the latter being the case in Syria, he added.—APP

India, Kuwait upgrade ties to strategic partnership on Modi visit

NEW DELHI: India and Kuwait upgraded bilateral ties to a strategic partnership on Sunday as their leaders eye stronger cooperation in "key sectors" ranging from pharmaceuticals to security. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed a strategic partnership agreement with Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during his trip to the Gulf state, the first visit by an Indian leader in 43 years. "We have elevated our partnership to a strategic one and I am optimistic that our friendship will flourish even more in the times to come," Modi said in a statement.—APP

RCCI urges FBR to onboard stakeholders on tax laws (amendment) bill 2024

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has called upon the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to engage stakeholders and the business community in consultations over the proposed Tax Laws (Amendment) Bill 2024. RCCI emphasized that the proposed amendments could further discourage the business community and widen the trust deficit between taxpayers and the FBR. RCCI President Usman Shaukat, in an official statement, expressed concerns, stating, "These amendments

are overly stringent and will create significant hurdles for businesses to operate smoothly. They will further erode the already fragile



trust between the business community and the tax authorities." The RCCI urges the government to recon-

sider these amendments and engage in meaningful consultations with stakeholders to create a more business-friendly and trust-based tax environment. He urged the FBR to prioritize dialogue and transparency, ensuring that stakeholders' concerns are addressed before finalizing any legislative changes. RCCI believes that inclusive consultations are essential for fostering a fair and business-friendly taxation system. The RCCI remains committed to supporting constructive reforms that promote economic growth while safeguarding the interests of the business community.

India child marriage crackdown reaches nearly 5,000 arrests

GUWAHATI, India: A crackdown on illegal child marriages in India's northeast has resulted in nearly 5,000 arrests, after 416 people were detained in the latest police sweep, a minister said Sunday. "We will continue to take bold steps to end this social evil," Himanta Biswa Sarma, chief minister of Assam state, said in a statement. "Assam continues its fight against child marriage," he added, saying raids have been carried out overnight and that those arrested would be produced in court on Sunday. India is home to more than 220 million child brides, according to the United Nations, but the number of child weddings has fallen dramatically this century. Assam state had already arrested thousands in earlier abolition drives that began in February 2023, including parents of married couples and registrars who signed off on underage betrothals. It takes the total now arrested to more than 4,800 people. Sarma has campaigned on a platform of stamping out child marriages completely in his state by 2026. The legal marriage age in India is 18 but millions of children are forced to tie the knot when they are younger, particularly in poorer rural areas. Many parents marry off their children in the hope of improving their financial security. The results can be devastating, with girls dropping out of school to cook and clean for their husbands, and suffering health problems from giving birth at a young age. In a landmark 2017 judgment, India's top court said that sex with an underage wife constituted rape, a ruling cheered by activists.—APP

Suspect in German Christmas market attack held on murder charges

MAGDEBURG: A man suspected of plowing a car through crowds at a German Christmas market in an attack that killed five people and injured scores faces multiple charges of murder and attempted murder, police said on Sunday. Friday evening's attack in the central city of Magdeburg shocked the country and stirred up tensions over the charged issue of immigration. The suspect, who was in custody, is a 50-year-old psychiatrist from Saudi Arabia with a history of anti-Islamic rhetoric who has lived in Germany for almost two decades. The motive for the attack remained unclear. There were scuffles and some "minor disturbances" at a far-right demonstration attended by around 2,100 people on Saturday night in Magdeburg, police said. They added that criminal proceedings would follow, but did not give details. Protesters, some wearing black balaclavas, held up a large banner with the word "remigration," a term popular with supporters of the far right who seek the mass deportation of immigrants and people deemed not ethnically German.—APP

Contractors in Pakistan hit by financial crisis due to old rates, heavy liabilities & delayed payments

Federal, provincial govts must prioritize timely release of funds for development projects, The federal & provincial governments should introduce a system of quarterly rate revisions

MUMTAZ AHMED BHATTI



THE construction industry in Pakistan is currently facing significant challenges, primarily stemming from financial and administrative issues. Contractors are struggling under the weight of delayed payments and outdated project rates, creating a crisis that threatens to halt the progress of numerous development projects. One of the most pressing issues

accumulation of heavy liabilities due to pending payments from federal and provincial governments. Development projects often rely on timely disbursement of funds to maintain progress. However, the consistent failure to release payments on time has left many construction companies unable to sustain their operations. This issue is compounded by the fact that many companies have already completed their projects but remain unpaid due to a lack of available funds. The financial strain caused by these delays has pushed several construction companies into severe financial crises. Many firms are forced to halt their work mid-project, leaving expensive machinery unused and deteriorating. Staff salaries remain unpaid, further exacerbating the situation for workers who rely on this income to support their families. The inability to honor financial commitments undermines contractors' credi-

bility and limits their capacity to take on new projects, creating a ripple effect that impacts the broader economy. Another major challenge facing contractors is the reliance on outdated construction rates. Many companies are operating under rates established as far back as 2012, which do not account for the inflationary pressures and rising costs of construction materials, labor, and fuel. This disparity between operational costs and outdated compensation rates severely undermines contractors' financial viability. Inflation in Pakistan has significantly increased the cost of key materials such as cement, steel, and sand. Labor wages have risen due to the escalating cost of living. Fuel prices, which play a crucial role in construction operations, have also seen a consistent upward trend. The lack of rate revisions to reflect these economic realities places an undue burden on contractors, leading to

financial instability and reduced project efficiency. The combined effects of delayed payments and outdated rates have led to the suspension of numerous development schemes initiated by federal and provincial governments. Without adequate funding, work on hundreds of projects has come to a standstill. Construction equipment sits idle, gathering rust, while workers are left without jobs. This stagnation has broader implications for the economy, as the construction sector plays a pivotal role in generating employment and driving infrastructure development. The halt in development projects also undermines public confidence in government initiatives. Infrastructure projects are often highly visible symbols of progress and development. When these projects are delayed or abandoned, they create an impression of inefficiency and mismanagement, eroding trust in government institutions. In their

quest for justice, many contractors have been forced to seek legal recourse to recover their dues. Filing cases in courts is not only time-consuming but also financially draining for companies already struggling with limited resources. These legal battles often lead to further delays in payments and project completion, exacerbating the financial difficulties faced by contractors. Administrative hurdles also contribute to the crisis. The documentation and approval processes for development schemes are often overly complex and time-consuming. From the tendering stage to project completion and payment, contractors must navigate a bureaucratic maze that hinders efficiency and delays progress. Simplifying these processes could significantly reduce the burden on contractors and ensure smoother project execution. Addressing the challenges faced by contractors in Pakistan requires a multifaceted

approach. Federal and provincial governments must prioritize the timely release of funds for development projects. Establishing a clear and transparent payment schedule can help contractors plan their operations more effectively and avoid financial crises. To account for inflation and rising costs, the government should introduce a system of quarterly rate revisions. Regularly updating construction rates to reflect market realities will ensure contractors receive fair compensation for their work, reducing financial strain. Development schemes should be launched only within the constraints of available budgets. Overcommitting to projects without securing sufficient funds leads to delays and inefficiencies. Governments should focus on fewer, well-funded projects to ensure successful completion. Simplifying the documentation process for development schemes can significantly reduce delays and administrative

hurdles. Introducing digital systems for tendering, approvals, and payments can improve transparency and efficiency. Collaborating with private sector stakeholders can help mobilize additional resources for development projects. Public-private partnerships can also introduce innovative solutions and improve project management. Setting up dedicated mechanisms for resolving payment disputes can provide contractors with a quicker and more efficient alternative to lengthy court battles. These mechanisms should be impartial and accessible to ensure fair outcomes. Providing training and resources to contractors can help them better manage financial and operational challenges. Workshops and seminars on project management, financial planning, and legal compliance can enhance their capabilities. The construction industry in Pakistan is at a critical juncture, facing challenges that require urgent attention from all stakeholders.

Briefs

Pope Francis condemns 'cruelty' of Israeli strikes on Gaza

WEB DESK

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis doubled down Sunday on his condemnation of Israel's strikes on the Gaza Strip, denouncing their "cruelty" for the second time in as many days despite Israel accusing him of "double standards." "And with pain I think of Gaza, of so much cruelty, of the children being machine-gunned, of the bombings of schools and hospitals. What cruelty," the pope said after his weekly Angelus prayer. It comes a day after the 88-year-old Argentine lamented an Israeli airstrike that killed seven children from one family on Friday, according to Gaza's rescue agency. "Yesterday children were bombed. This is cruelty, this is not war," the pope told members of the government of the Holy See. His remarks on Saturday prompted a sharp response from Israel. An Israeli foreign ministry spokesman described Francis's intervention as "particularly disappointing as they are disconnected from the true and factual context of Israel's fight against jihadist terrorism — a multi-front war that was forced upon it starting on October 7." "Enough with the double standards and the singling out of the Jewish state and its people," he added.

Putin vows more 'destruction' on Ukraine

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday vowed to bring more "destruction" to Ukraine in retaliation for a drone attack on a high-rise apartment block in the central Russian city of Kazan a day earlier. "Whoever, and however much they try to destroy, they will face many times more destruction themselves and will regret what they are trying to do in our country," Putin said in comments on the attack on Kazan — which left no casualties — during a televised government meeting. — Agencies

Funeral prayers of martyred soldiers offered

DNA

BANNU: Funeral prayers of martyrs, who embraced martyrdom in an exchange of fire with terrorists in South Waziristan, were offered in Bannu Cantt on Sunday. Peshawar Corps Commander, senior officers of Pakistan Army, jawans, and locals of the area attended the funeral prayers.

Pak-Iran trade volume should be enhanced to \$10b: Moghaddam

The Ambassador proposed transforming the Pakistan-Iran border into a 'commercial gateway' to strengthen trade ties. He also suggested expanding border markets, opening new crossing points, and establishing Customs Facilitation Desks to facilitate smoother trade

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and the Embassy of Iran have decided to collaborate for the growth of business and economic development by breaking down trade barriers for the mutual benefit of both nations. This landmark agreement was reached during Iranian Ambassador H.E. Raza Amiri Moghaddam's goodwill visit to ICCI to congratulate the newly inducted ICCI leadership. The two sides agreed to further enhance economic, trade, and cultural relations between Pakistan and Iran. To achieve this goal, they established a four-member committee (two members from each side) for further deliberations and to maintain close coordination on necessary actions. ICCI President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi and Iranian Ambassador Raza Amiri Moghaddam discussed at length various matters of mutual interest to strengthen bilateral cooperation and collaboration. Ambassador Moghaddam acknowledged the progress in Pakistan-Iran relations in recent years but highlighted that there remains significant untapped potential for deeper collaboration. He emphasized the need to increase the trade volume between the two countries from the current \$2.7 billion to a target of \$10 billion. The Ambassador proposed transforming the Pakistan-Iran border into a 'commercial gateway' to strengthen trade ties. He also suggested expanding border markets, opening new crossing points, and establishing Customs Facilitation Desks to facilitate smoother trade. Additionally, he noted that Gwadar and Chabahar ports hold enormous potential for joint use, as both are strategically



positioned on key international trade routes that provide connectivity to Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. The Iranian envoy further stressed the need to remove bureaucratic bottlenecks on both sides and develop an efficient mechanism, including banking channels, to foster economic growth. He also suggested that the business communities of both countries should meet to establish a framework for joint ventures, as Iran has successfully done with Turkey. On this occasion, Ambassador Moghaddam handed over an invitation from the President of Tehran Chamber of Commerce and Industry to ICCI President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi to visit Tehran. In response, ICCI

President Qureshi warmly welcomed the distinguished guest and highlighted that Pakistan is implementing a coordinated roadmap to increase foreign investment and is offering attractive opportunities for international investors. He emphasized that cooperation between Pakistan and Iran should be expanded across all sectors to enable both countries to benefit from each other's experiences and capabilities. Qureshi pointed out that international pressures, regional instability, and security challenges have hindered business interactions between the two countries. However, he expressed confidence that both nations' resilient and determined business communities are capable of overcoming these obstacles.

He emphasized the shared historical, cultural, and industrial strengths of Pakistan and Iran, which can be leveraged to deepen their mutual ties. He proposed that Iran could export its oil through Pakistan and both countries could also collaborate on pharmaceuticals and agricultural goods through joint ventures, benefiting both economies. Furthermore, Qureshi suggested that the frequent exchange of trade and cultural delegations, along with B2B meetings, would bring the business communities of the two countries closer together. He also invited Iranian businesses to attend a trade exhibition that ICCI plans to organize in the middle of next year, offering an opportunity to showcase products and explore new business opportunities.

'UNSC responsible for failing to stop war'

DNA

RAMALLAH: Palestinian ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates// Holds the UN Security Council Responsible for Failing to Stop the War of Extermination and Displacement. After 443 days, the occupation continues to deepen the war of extermination and displacement against our people and escalates its massacres against Palestinian civilians, and launches a fierce attack on hospitals, especially Kamal Adwan and Al-Awda, on the road to complete evacuation and destruction in the northern Gaza Strip and turning it into scorched earth unfit for human life, in unprecedented disregard for the international community, world public opinion, and international judicial authorities and the orders and decisions they have issued demanding an end to the war and ensuring the sustainable delivery of aid, in light of international inability and abject failure to respect and implement these decisions, reaching the point of suspicious collusion. The Ministry holds the UN Security Council fully responsible for this failure to address its legal and moral responsibilities, and demands that it compel the occupying state to stop its extermination and crimes. For its part, the Ministry continues its political, diplomatic and international legal activity with decision-making centers in the world to mobilize the broadest international pressure front to implement the relevant United Nations and international court decisions, foremost among which is the immediate cessation of the war of genocide, displacement and aggression against our people.

Pak blocks passports of 4,700 nationals

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The government of Pakistan has taken a stern stance against its citizens involved in criminal activities abroad, specifically in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). According to official sources, the passports of 4,700 Pakistani nationals currently imprisoned in the UAE have been blocked. The decision comes after the UAE authorities provided detailed information about the 5,292 citizens of Pakistan serving jail terms for various offences. Among the blocked passports, 2,470 belong to individuals convicted of drug-related crimes, while 100 are linked to fraud, deception, and sexual harassment cases. Additionally, the passports of 704 Pakistanis imprisoned for theft and 216 involved in murder and robbery have also been revoked. Furthermore, the government has blocked the passports of 375 Pakistani nationals residing illegally in the UAE.

After 50 children die Protest erupts over road closure in Parachinar

Edhi sources say 31 deaths reported from DHQ Hospital alone

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: As many as 50 children, suffering from different diseases, have lost their lives in strife-torn Parachinar after they could not be taken to hospitals due to the closure of roads. Addressing the people, who have been holding a sit-in outside the local press club for the last few days in bitterly cold weather to register their protest against the closure of roads, social worker Asadullah said that the items of daily use, including food items, are not available in the area due to the closure of routes while the gas supply had also stopped, forcing the people to go without food. He said the protest would continue until and unless the roads were not reopened for traffic. On the other hand, sources in Edhi, while confirming the figures of deaths of children as given by the social worker, told 24News TV channel that 31 fatalities had been reported from the DHQ Hospital while at surrounding hospitals. Speaking on the occasion, MPA Ali Hadilrfani, while terming the closure of roads extremely unfor-

unate, demanded their reopening so that people could be provided foodstuff and items of daily use, including medicines. On Saturday, all private and public education institutions were closed in the area on the call given by religious scholars to protest against the closure of roads. The prolonged road blockades have caused an acute shortage of food, items of daily use, while the non-supply of gas has aggravated the problem in the district. Markets, restaurants, and bakeries remain closed, leaving residents in dire straits. Headmasters and principals of local schools have now joined the protests, closing all educational institutions to draw attention to the worsening situation. Speaking at a press conference in Parachinar, religious leaders including Allama Noor Hussain Najafi, Allama Khayal Hussain, Allama Syed Safdar Ali Shah, Allama Iran Ali, and Allama Muhammad Hussain Tahiri, condemned Adviser to KP Chief Minister on Information Barrister Mohammad Ali Saif's statement in which he had refuted reports of children dying due to the non-provision of medical treatment. Member National Assembly Hamid Hussain and tribal leader Jalal Bangash also condemned the statement.

Govt approves additional subsidies for power sector

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The government of Pakistan has decided to release more than 50 billion rupees (Rs) in subsidies for the power sector. According to reports, Rs159 billion has already been released to the power sector in the current financial year, but now more than Rs50 billion in subsidies are in the pipeline. Govt sources say that in the first quarter, Rs128 billion were released for power sector subsidies, and in the second quarter, Rs31 billion have been released so far. After an additional Rs50 billion, the total released subsidy will exceed Rs209 billion. According to sources, the flow of circular debt is much lower than the target set by the IMF by December. Ac-

ording to the IMF's target for December 2024, the flow of circular debt in the power sector is to be kept below Rs461 billion, while by December 19, 2024, the target of circular debt has reached only Rs70 billion, which is much lower than the target. Government sources have expressed hope that as a result of reducing losses and increasing efficiency, the IMF's target for circular debt in the power sector will be easily achieved. Back in October 2024, the World Bank revealed that the power sector subsidies in Pakistan have increased by a staggering 400% in the last five years, putting a major burden on the federal government's finances. According to the World Bank report, the growing number of protected consumers had contributed to the surge in subsidy burden, with 94% of domestic consumers benefiting from the budgetary subsidy in 2024. The power sector subsidy climbed from Rs. 236 billion in the financial year 2020 to Rs. 1190 billion in the current financial year, a staggering increase of Rs. 954 billion. The inability to reduce losses and poor recovery of electricity bills have contributed to the circular debt, which has averaged Rs. 400 billion annually for the past four years despite reforms.

Syria's de facto ruler reassures minorities

Ahmed Al-Sharaa said no sects would be excluded in Syria in what he described as 'a new era far removed from sectarianism'

NEWS DESK

DAMASCUS: Syria's de facto ruler Ahmed Al-Sharaa hosted Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt on Sunday in another effort to reassure minorities they will be protected after Islamist militants led the ouster of Bashar Assad two weeks ago. Sharaa said no sects would be excluded in Syria in what he described as "a new era far removed from sectarianism." Sharaa heads the Islamist Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), the main group that forced Assad out on Dec. 8. Some Syrians and foreign powers have worried he may impose strict Islamic governance on a country with numerous minority groups such as Druze, Kurds, Christians and Alawites. "We take pride in our culture, our religion and our Islam. Being part of the Islamic environment does not mean the exclusion of other sects. On the contrary, it is our duty to protect them," he said during the meeting with Jumblatt, in comments broadcast by Lebanese broadcaster Al Jazeera. Jumblatt, a veteran politician and prominent Druze leader, said at the meeting that Assad's ouster should usher in new constructive relations between Lebanon and Syria.

Turkiye's FM meets Syria's Jolani in Damascus

WEB DESK

ANKARA: Türkiye's foreign minister Hakan Fidan met with Syria's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa in Damascus on Sunday, Ankara's foreign ministry said. A video released by the Anadolu state news agency showed the two men greeting each other. No details of where the meeting took place in the Syrian capital were released by the ministry. Fidan had announced on Friday that he planned to travel to Damascus to meet Syria's new leaders, who ousted Syria's strongman Bashar Assad after a lightning offensive. Türkiye's spy chief Ibrahim Kalin had earlier visited the city on December 12, just a few days after Assad's fall. Kalin was filmed leaving the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, surrounded by bodyguards, as broadcast by the private Turkish channel NTV.

DECEMBER 2024

Pakistan's Premier News & Diplomatic Affairs Magazine

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