



Islamabad POST

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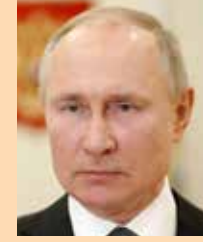
Detailed News On Page-06

Slovakia could host peace talks: Putin

Detailed News On Page-07

Kuram's peace is govt's top priority: KP CM

Detailed News On Page-07



'No change in stance on May 9'

No political leader's desire greater than Pakistan's interests

Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry also welcomes dialogue among politicians to resolve issues

STAFF REPORT / DNA

RAWALPINDI: Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said on Friday that no political leader's desire for power should be more important than Pakistan's interests. "All political parties and leaders are respectable to us. No individual, his politics and his desire for power are above Pakistan," the military's spokesperson said during a media briefing at the General Headquarters, Rawalpindi. The ISPR DG's comments came in response to a question about purported backdoor talks between the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the establishment. The reporter also mentioned that there were reports of a certain "officer" being involved amid talks between the government and the PTI. He explained that the Pakistan Army has professional and governmental relations with every government. However, he noted that since political parties form governments, it wasn't "appropriate" to paint this "governmental and professional relation" as political. "Pakistan Army is a national force and it does not belong to a specific school of thought or party," the military's spokesperson said. Currently, he said, the parties having majority support have made the governments in the centre and provinces. Holding talks among political parties and responding to them is the prerogative of the political parties. "Nevertheless, it is welcoming that politicians sit together to resolve the matters among themselves instead of through anarchist and violent politics." The ISPR DG welcomed the notion of dialogue among politicians to resolve their issues. "It is encouraging that politicians sit together and solve their problems through conversation." When asked about the court martial of former spy chief Faiz Hamid, the ISPR DG was of the view that Pakistan Army's accountability system is comprehensive and it works on evidence rather than allegations. "If someone uses its designation for personal or

Continued on Page 06

PTI calls for transparency in 'justice'

The PTI spokesperson further argued that the root cause of unrest in the country lies in flawed narratives and actions

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), while responding to the DG ISPR's recent press conference, emphasized the need for transparency in justice and adherence to constitutional principles. In his media talk, Director General of Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Lt. Gen. Ahmed Sharif emphasized the need to break the "political backing of the illegal spectrum in the country". Responding to this talk, PTI Central Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram said in a statement that justice demands complete transparency, and the state must rise above traditional practices to uphold justice. He criticized the use of preconceived narratives and said that decisions based on such notions neither deliver justice nor gain public acceptance. Akram underscored the importance of constitutional courts, saying, "Decisions on accountability and punishment belong to the judiciary under the Constitution."

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs the federal cabinet meeting. - DNA

President Zardari vows to protect Sindh's rights

No cut in water, gas shares, President assures Sindh

DNA

LARKANA: Addressing the public gathering, President Asif Ali Zardari has promised the people of Sindh that their water and gas "would not go anywhere" apparently referring to the federal government's project for constructing six canals on the River Indus. "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh will also get their rights," he said, urging the people to refrain from getting panic. Zardari said he has become president for the second time due to unwavering support from the people of Sindh. "We reversed the verdict of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's case after 43 years, now it will always remain a judicial murder," he added.

Continued on Page 06

Double standards won't work Kabul must take concrete action against TTP: PM

"TTP should be stopped from killing our innocent people," says PM urging Afghan government action

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday asked the Afghan government once again to act against the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) carrying out terror activities inside Pakistan from across the Afghan border, calling it unacceptable and a red line for his country. In his opening remarks during the cabinet meeting, the prime minister said: "Unfortunately, TTP is operating from Afghanistan and carrying out terror attacks and killing innocent people inside Pakistan. This cannot go on. We have conveyed to the Afghan government that we desire good ties with them but TTP should be stopped from killing our innocent people." "This is a red line. TTP operating from there against Pakistan is unacceptable," he added. He highlighted that Afghanistan was a neighboring country with a thousands of kilometers-long shared border with Pakistan, adding: "We desire cordial ties with each other and cooperation in trade, economy and other sectors." The prime minister asked the Afghan government to formulate a solid strategy as Pakistan was ready to talk with them on the issue. But the policy of talks and allowing TTP to

Continued on Page 06

Cabinet okays amendments to madrassa bill

Cabinet also approves amendments to Income Tax Ordinance, 2024

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet on Friday greenlighted amendments to the contentious Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024, which deals with the registration of madrassas after the government and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) settled all differences over the disputed legislation. According to a statement issued by Prime Minister Office, the meeting approved amendments in the Societies Registration Act 1860, based on the law ministry's recommendations. The development came two days after JUI-F Senator Kamran Murtaza said that all differences related to the madrassa registration bill between the

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

India announces state funeral for ex-PM

Seven days of state mourning will be observed throughout India

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI: India announced seven days of state mourning on Friday after the death of former prime minister Manmohan Singh, one of the architects of the country's economic liberalisation in the early 1990s. Singh, who held office from 2004 to 2014, died at the age of 92 late on Thursday evening at a hospital in New Delhi. He will also be accorded a state funeral. The Indian government said in a statement on Friday that seven days of state mourning will be observed throughout India "as a mark of respect for the departed dignitary."

Govt warns PTI over PAC

Third letter sent to PTI over PAC chairman appointment

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhary, chief whip of ruling party, has written a third letter to PTI chief whip Amir Dogar, criticising delays in appointing the PAC chairman. Dr Tariq emphasised the government's commitment to completing the process next week, noting repeated requests for a four-member panel from the opposition. Despite a 10-month delay, the government remains focused on ensuring transparency by offering the PAC chairmanship to the opposition.

Holiday Notice

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

'Nuclear program real target'

PPP sees 'conspiracy' behind US statements

PPP's supporters across country observing 17th death anniversary of Benazir Bhutto

NAZIR SIYAL

LARKANA: Apparently referring to the statements by President-elect Trump's aide and other US lawmakers, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari wondered "why those who conspired against Pakistan are raising voice for PTI founder Imran Khan". "We have to get united to deal with the conspiracy being hatched against us [Pakistan]. We have to think about the Pakistan and its defence while keeping aside politics," the PPP chief said. "They [international powers] are casting an evil eye on nuclear technology gifted by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto." Expressing annoyance over "foreign interference" in Pakistan's internal affairs, the PPP chairman said: "Statements are being issued from US about our internal politics; these statements are just excuses." He said that the US lawmakers had nothing to do with democracy in Pakistan, adding: "PTI founder is just an excuse, their real target is Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme."

Continued on Page 06

AJK Assembly passes resolution against US sanction

The resolution highlights Pakistan's pivotal role in regional stability

DNA

MUZAFRABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Assembly has unanimously passed a resolution condemning the US sanction on Pakistan, presented by former PM Raja Farooq Haider Khan. The resolution criticised the US efforts to disrupt regional power balance in favour of India and reaffirmed Pakistan's missile programme as purely defensive. Raja Farooq Haider accused the US of being influenced by Indian lobbying. AJK PM Chaudhry Anwarul Haq reiterated unwavering support for Pakistan's military and

Continued on Page 06

EU issues scam alert in Pakistan

Criminal organisations spreading fake visa info via Google Maps, misleading Pakistanis about services, says EU Office

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The European Union (EU) Delegation to Pakistan has issued a public warning regarding a scam targeting Pakistani citizens about criminal organisations spreading misleading information about visa and consular appointments by creating fake embassy listings and phone numbers on Google Maps. In a statement shared on X on Friday, the delegation confirmed that several fake entries for EU member state embassies had been observed in Islamabad.

Continued on Page 06

South Korea votes to impeach acting president Han Duck-soo

A protest erupted in parliament as lawmakers voted to impeach acting president Han Duck-soo

NEWS DESK

SEOUL: South Korea has voted to impeach its acting president Han Duck-soo, two weeks after parliament voted to impeach its President Yoon Suk Yeol. A total of 192 lawmakers voted for his impeachment, more than the 151 votes needed for it to succeed. Prime minister Han took over the role after President Yoon was impeached by parliament following his failed attempt to impose martial law on 3 December. Han was supposed to lead the country out of its political turmoil, but opposition MPs argued that he was refusing demands to complete Yoon's impeachment process. Chaos erupted in parliament as the vote was held on Friday. Lawmakers from Yoon and Han's ruling People Power Party (PPP) protested after National Assembly speaker Woo Won-shik announced that only 151 votes would be needed to pass the impeachment bill. This meant that, unlike the 200 votes required for Yoon's impeachment, no votes from ruling lawmakers would be needed this time for Han to be impeached in parliament. Ruling party MPs gathered in the middle of the voting chamber chanting, "invincible!" and "abuse of power!" in response, and called for the

Continued on Page 06

German president dissolves parliament

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who lost confidence vote this month, will act as caretaker chancellor at time of rising turmoil

FOREIGN DESK

BERLIN: German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has dissolved the country's parliament, confirming that snap elections prompted by the recent collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government will be held on February 23. Delivering a speech at Berlin's Bellevue Palace on Friday, Steinmeier said that the country required "a government capable of acting" and "reliable majorities in parliament" to maintain stability in "difficult times". Scholz, a Social Democrat, lost a confidence vote in parliament earlier this month after the departure of Finance Minister Christian Lindner's Free Democrats left his unwieldy governing

Continued on Page 06

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Govt encourages volunteer repatriation of Afghan refugees

He said peaceful Afghanistan was in the interest of Pakistan, adding that Afghan soil should not be used for unlawful activities against Pakistan. We should not forget our long history, brotherhood and underlined the need for avoiding negativity, he added

DNA

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Friday said the government encouraged volunteer and dignified repatriation of the Afghan refugees to their homeland. He was addressing the closing ceremony of Afghan Cricket League 2024 organized by Education and Youth Development Cell, Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees KP in collaboration with GIZ and UNHCR as chief guest held here at Islamia College University, Peshawar. Engr Amir Muqam in his keynote address while congratulating the winning team and organizers of the cricket league said that Pakistan was the only country in world that are still hosting about three million Afghan refugees and shared all facilities including educational institutions, hospitals, business, hotels,

transports etc with them during the longest 45 years stay since 1979 here. He said peaceful Afghanistan was in the interest of Pakistan, adding that Afghan soil should not be used for unlawful activities against Pakistan. We should not forget our long history, brotherhood and underlined the need for avoiding negativity, he added.

While appreciating the assistance of foreign donor agencies, the Federal Minister expressed the hope that International Community and foreign donors would not leave these millions of Afghan refugees' abandon in Pakistan and would continue to provide assistance to them as well as for development of the host community here. He expressed the hope that these refugees would be provided a safe environment at their home country where they could live with happiness and peace so that they could not return back to Pakistan. Engr Amir Muqam urged Afghan

refugees to keep close vigil eyes inside their camps and inform the relevant authorities while seeing any suspected or unwanted elements among them so that prompt action could be taken against them. The Federal Minister said that sports was playing a key role in bringing people closer and creating tolerance in society. He said that it was good omen that players from all regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa attended the Afghan Cricket League played between October 10-27 December 2024 here. He said Islamia College Peshawar plays a key role in promotion of quality education and sports. Earlier, Engr Amir Muqam was warmly received by the Vice Chancellor of Islamia College University, organizers and players upon arrival at the venue. The players were introduced to Engr Amir Muqam who appreciated their performance and distributed prizes and trophies among them.



ISLAMABAD: A view of plants covered with dry grass on a green belt to protecting from frost and cold weather, in the Federal Capital.

Abbottabad admin vows timely revenue services

ABBOTTABAD: Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad Sanaulah Khan Thursday directed to take immediate action on pending revenue cases, inheritance transfers, registry processes, and challenges in the computerization of land records. He expressed these views while chairing the meeting of District Revenue Review Committee. The Deputy Commissioner directed all revenue officers, including magistrates, tehsildars, and naib tehsildars, to expedite the resolution of outstanding cases and streamline the computerization process to enhance service delivery. He stressed the importance of providing timely and efficient services to citizens and ensuring all procedures are completed within specified timeframes. Deputy Director of the Service Delivery Center, Farrukh Masood, presented a briefing on the current status of the center's operations. He outlined the issues encountered during the computerization of land records and detailed the pending inheritance transfers in five revenue estates. The Deputy Commissioner instructed immediate resolution of these challenges and directed the Tehsildar Abbottabad to extend full cooperation to the Service Delivery Center for improved outcomes. Further directives were issued to accelerate the completion of pending inheritance transfers at the Service Delivery Center and to implement additional measures for enhancing revenue services.—APP

Quaid's life – A guiding force for youth

PESHAWAR: As we celebrated another birth anniversary of founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on Wednesday, his philosophy of life and messages especially for students are beacon of light for our youth. The architect of Pakistan, Jinnah always stood tall among 20th-century leaders receiving accolades both from friends and rivals with world leaders and writers praising his undeterred courage and struggle for creating a separate homeland for Muslims of the sub-continent. Stanley Wolpert, a renowned US historian validly praised the Quaid in his book 'Jinnah of Pakistan' published in 1948 saying "few individuals significantly alter the course of

history and fewer modify the world map. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Muhammad Ali Jinnah did all three." Vijay Lakshmi Pundit, a prominent figure of India and Nehru's sister remarked, "If the Muslim League had 100 Gandhis and 200 Azads and Congress had only one Jinnah, then India would have not been divided." Not only these two but numerous other writers and historians praised Quaid for bravely fighting the case of Muslim nationhood in India and created a separate homeland for them on August 14, 1947, within seven years of the adoption of Pakistan Resolution at Lahore on March 23, 1940. The legendary leader had reorganized the All India Muslim

League (AIML) through repeated visits to all Muslims majority provinces of British India including NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) to mobilize people and students. Besides other destinations, his visits to historic Islamia College, Peshawar (ICP) in 1936, 1945 and 1948 speak highly of Quaid's affiliation with youth and students. "Quaid and Islamia College are inseparable. In 1945, Quaid had received a rousing welcome from Muslim Students Federation (MSF) and funds for Pakistan Movement," said Professor Younas Khan, Chairman Pakistan Studies Department, Islamia College Peshawar. "MSF also assured committed educated workers for independence movement."—APP

Alhamra hosts session on Maulana Rumi's timeless Masnavi

LAHORE: The Lahore Arts Council, Alhamra, in collaboration with Kitab Club, organised a thought-provoking session on Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi's visionary work, Masnavi. The event featured a distinguished lecture by renowned scholar Dr. Pir Tariq Sharif Zada, illuminating Rumi's profound philosophy and timeless teachings. The initiative, part of Alhamra & Kitab Club's mission to revive a culture of reading, marked its first session by focusing on Maulana Rumi's masterpiece Masnavi. These literary gatherings promise to be a unique step in fostering intellectual and cultural enlightenment. Dr. Pir Tariq Sharif Zada's reflections on Maulana Rumi's life and teachings captivated the audience. Highlighting Rumi's central theme of divine love, he remarked, "Maulana Rumi delves into the depths of love, spiritual guidance, and the discovery of moments filled with knowledge and wisdom. He further said his teachings remind us that while there are countless paths to God, the one he chose—the path of love for His creation—is the most cherished." Quoting Rumi, Dr. Sharif Zada emphasized, "The essence of my life is summarized in three phrases: 'I was raw, I refined,' and 'I was burned.' The most powerful way to avoid evil is to surround oneself with good friends who have turned their hearts toward God." Chairman Alhamra Razi Ahmed and Executive Director Syed Tauqeer Haider Kazmi lauded the initiative, stating, "This new series will not only introduce people to essential and impactful books but also reflect Lahore's literary heritage and Alhamra's enduring love for literature." The session set the tone for a broader initiative to celebrate intellectual discourse, foster a deeper appreciation for literary classics, and reaffirm Alhamra's role as the cultural heart of Lahore.—APP

Minister, Austrian envoy discuss steps for welfare of minorities

Ambassador Andree Wick and other members of the Austrian delegation commended the Punjab government's efforts in promoting interfaith dialogue and advancing the rights of religious minorities

DNA

LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Minorities Ramesh Singh Arora held a meeting with Austrian Ambassador in Pakistan, Andree Wick, at his camp office on Friday. During the meeting, Minister Ramesh Singh Arora provided a detailed briefing on various measures taken by the Punjab government to ensure the protection and empowerment of religious minorities. The minister highlighted the progressive steps taken by the provincial government to foster inclusivity and promote religious harmony. Minister Arora emphasized the recent initiatives aimed at celebrating religious festivals and uplifting minority communities, including the historic Christmas ceremony held at Asif Town's Prayers Church, where Chief Minister Punjab, Mar-

yam Nawaz, was also present. He spoke about the distribution of Christmas grants and the upcoming inauguration of the minority cards, which will benefit 50,000 families in January 2025. Furthermore, the Minister shared details of the Punjab government's participation in several interfaith celebrations, including CM's visit to Maryambad, the government-level observance of the Baisakhi and Diwali festivals, and the Honhaar Scholarship Program, which includes scholarships for minority youth. He also mentioned the Laptops Scheme, which aims to enhance educational opportunities for deserving students from minority communities. The minister also briefed the envoy about upcoming five years strategic plan with the help of World Bank for the protection

of religious minorities as well as all segments of the society. Ambassador Andree Wick and other members of the Austrian delegation commended the Punjab government's efforts in promoting interfaith dialogue and advancing the rights of religious minorities. They expressed appreciation for the inclusive policies and initiatives introduced by the provincial government, acknowledging their significance in building a more tolerant and equitable society.

The meeting concluded with mutual promises to continue fostering closer ties between Pakistan and Austria, with a special focus on promoting the welfare of minorities and facilitating cultural exchanges. At the end of the meeting, the provincial minister gave away a shield to the Austrian ambassador.

ITP penalties 800,000, issues 64,395 new driving licenses in 2024

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) took action against over 800,000 vehicles and motorcycles for traffic violations during the year of 2024, an ITP spokesperson said on Friday. He told APP that legal actions were initiated against 1,019 individuals for severe violations of traffic laws. He added that 300 individuals were issued legal notices after the suspension of driving licenses and route permits for transport vehicles. The spokesperson mentioned that over 10,000 vehicles and more than 40,000 motorcycles were impounded for serious violations at various police stations. Additionally, fines were imposed on 100,000 vehicles for illegal parking, 64,000 for using fancy number plates, and over 17,000 for having tinted windows. ITP penalties 800,000, issues 64,395 new driving licenses in 2024. The ITP also issued tickets for traffic violations, including 56,000 for motorcyclists without helmets, 16,000 for overloading, and over 25,000 for lane violations. In 2024, the ITP issued 64,395 internationally recognized driving licenses, renewed 62,876 licenses, and provided over 112,000 learner permits to citizens seeking driving licenses. The spokesperson further shared that during the year, the ITP managed over 7,000 events, including the SCO Summit and the arrival of national and international delegations, ensuring smooth traffic flow and public safety. The spokesperson also noted that 30 ITP officers were injured while performing their duties throughout the year. Moreover, over 600,000 citizens received road safety and traffic law awareness, and 893 workshops on traffic laws were organized. The ITP also introduced several citizen-friendly initiatives, including "Facilitation and Education on Wheels" and the establishment of a Highway One Night Patrol Unit. To ensure a well-maintained traffic system in the federal capital, the ITP activated a Traffic Response Unit and established six dedicated traffic counters at Police Khidmat Markaz. Online services, such as license renewals, and doorstep assistance for citizens over 70 years of age, were also provided. Furthermore, the ITP established a Traffic Police Education Complex to raise awareness about traffic laws and installed signboards on highways to guide citizens. In its efforts to promote community policing, the ITP facilitated seven "Friends of Police" badges and four "Police Volunteers" badges, with their internships completed during the year. The ITP also conducted five flower candy campaigns and two road safety workshops in collaboration with private companies. During developmental projects in various areas of Islamabad, the ITP ensured uninterrupted traffic flow, despite ongoing construction.—DNA

36th Senior Management Course concludes at NIPA

The President and CEO of the Bank of Punjab Zafar Masud, addressing the ceremony as chief guest, appreciated the important role of higher officials in public service delivery and decision making at strategic and policy level and also acknowledged the efforts of NIPA for changing the landscape

DNA

KARACHI: The National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) Karachi, on Friday, successfully concluded its 36th Senior Management Course for officers who are in the eligibility zone for promotion to the next higher grade. Thirty nine officers belonging to different service groups of the federal and provincial governments and autonomous corporations taken part in the course aimed at improving the general management skills of the

participants and grooming them for assuming higher responsibilities. The President and CEO of the Bank of Punjab Zafar Masud, addressing the ceremony as chief guest, appreciated the important role of higher officials in public service delivery and decision making at strategic and policy level and also acknowledged the efforts of NIPA for changing the landscape. Zafar Masud stressed the need of completely overhauling the civil service system in Pakistan with revision of teaching methods and curriculum to align them

to the best international practices and the fast paced transformation of the world. Zafar Masud maintained that no such system exists in any part of the world where decision making is flawless and on a strategic and administrative level mistakes happen but our system does not give room for mistakes. He opined that management course curriculum needs to be revisited in accordance with the modern age technological and digital advancements. The Pakistani civil service high ups must review and learn from the remarka-

ble transformation of China and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and governance systems of UK and Malaysia in order to ensure the best service delivery and adaptation to shifting paradigms, he suggested and also urged to leverage from the emerging digital technologies which help improving service delivery and decision making. He also underscored the need to focus on environmental aspects and paradigm shift from traditional security to economic security. The President BoP, at the occasion, announced contribution on behalf of his bank, for making the

NIPA library a robust and state of the art institution with better facilities for officers acquiring training. He also announced to install an ATM at NIPA for facilitation of under training officers. The Director General NIPA Dr. Syed Saif ur Rehman, in his welcome speech, emphasized the importance of technological advancements and said "civil servants have to realign themselves in AI driven world". He stated that we are not masters but servants of the people, we have to utilize our professional acumen for the public.

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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
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Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
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Enquiry

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



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CDA chief condoles with Farhadov over loss of lives

Chairman CDA, Director General NAB Rawalpindi expressed their commitment to enhancing mutual cooperation and coordination between the two institutions

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, visited the Azerbaijan Embassy, visited the Azerbaijan Embassy on Friday to meet with the Ambassador of Azerbaijan, Khazar Farhadov, and express his heartfelt condolences over the tragic loss of lives in a recent plane crash. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa expressed deep sorrow over the incident and prayed for the departed souls, offering condolences to the bereaved families. He also wished for the swift recovery of those injured in the accident. "We stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Azerbaijan during this moment of grief," said Chairman CDA Randhawa. He highlighted the strong bonds between the two nations, built on shared religious and cultural values, and reaffirmed Pakistan's solidarity with the Azerbaijani people in their time of mourning. On the occasion, Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa also wrote a condolence note to honor those who lost their lives in the tragedy.



Ambassador Khazar Farhadov expressed his gratitude to the Chairman CDA for visiting the embassy and offering his support. Earlier, Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, held a meeting with Director General National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Rawalpindi, Mirza Irfan Baig, here on Friday. The meeting marked a significant step towards bolstering transparency and accountability processes within the CDA. Both leaders expressed their commitment to enhancing mutual cooperation and coordination between the two institutions. Chairman Randhawa emphasized the CDA's ongoing efforts to promote efficiency and transparency in its operations. Highlighting the authority's

focus on reducing human intervention, he noted that CDA is increasingly adopting automation and technology-based systems to streamline office processes and minimize the potential for corruption. The Chairman reiterated the CDA's dedication to working closely with NAB and leveraging its technical expertise to further improve accountability mechanisms. He assured that the CDA would continue to adopt best practices to maintain a corruption-free environment. DG NAB Mirza Irfan Baig lauded the CDA's efforts to promote transparency and assured the authority of NAB's full support in achieving shared goals of integrity and accountability. The meeting concluded with both sides reaffirming their resolve to strengthen collaboration for a transparent and efficient governance framework. Earlier, Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, visited the Serena Chowk Interchange project site on Friday to assess the progress of the ongoing construction work. He was accompanied by the Member Engineering and other senior

officials. During the visit, officials briefed the Chairman on the current status of the project. According to the briefing, significant progress has been achieved, with simultaneous work underway on the underpasses and connecting roads. Additionally, the piling work for the interchange has been completed, marking a critical milestone in the project's development. The officials informed Chairman Randhawa that construction teams are working round the clock to ensure the project meets its deadline. Any hurdles encountered during the construction process are being addressed on a priority basis. Expressing satisfaction with the progress so far, Chairman Randhawa directed the concerned authorities to accelerate the pace of construction while maintaining the highest standards of quality. He emphasized the importance of adhering to the stipulated timeline and resolving any remaining challenges promptly. The Serena Chowk Interchange project is a key infrastructure initiative aimed at improving traffic flow in the federal capital.

ANF seizes over 49 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting four operations recovered 49.250 kg drugs worth over Rs 5.4 million and arrested five suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 250 grams hashish was recovered from an accused arrested near a university in Rawalpindi. The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions. In another operation, 44.4 kg hashish and 2.4 kg opium hidden in a vehicle near New Muhammadabad Gujranwala were recovered and two suspects were arrested. 1.2 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of the accused near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza Attock. In fourth operation, 1 kg heroin was recovered from a woman netted near GT Road Attock. Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.—APP

Short-term inflation up by 0.80%: PBS

ISLAMABAD: The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), went up by 0.80 per cent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on December 26, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 326.96 points as compared to 324.38 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 5.08 per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed increase of 0.69 per cent and went up to 321.65 points from last week's 319.44 points. The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732 to 22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, increased by 0.78 percent, 0.76 percent, 0.82 percent and 0.81 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 17 (33.33%) items increased, 10 (19.61%) items decreased and 24 (47.06%) items remained stable. The items, which recorded major decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included onions (8.13%), potatoes (2.38%), pulse mash (1.28%), pulse gram (0.78%), bananas (0.68%), rice irri-6/9 (0.50%), eggs (0.30%) and rice basmati broken (0.15%). The commodities which recorded major increase in their average prices on week-on-week basis included chicken (22.47%), tomatoes (20.75%), sugar (2.19%), vegetable ghee 1kg (1.17%), firewood (0.95%), vegetable ghee 2.5kg (0.91%), cooking oil 5 litre (0.74%), cooked beef & mustard oil (0.69%) each, LPG (0.18%) and washing soap (0.09%).—APP

Azerbaijani plane crash ICCI delegation visits embassy to offer condolences

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) visited the Azerbaijan Embassy to extend condolences over the tragic crash of an Azerbaijani airliner that claimed numerous lives. During the meeting with Azerbaijan's Ambassador, Khazar Farhadov, ICCI Acting President Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry expressed profound sorrow and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed souls. He also prayed for strength for the grieving families and a swift recovery for the injured. He emphasized Pakistan's solidarity with Azerbaijan, highlighting the strong fraternal ties between the two nations, grounded in shared religious and cultural values. In addition, the acting President wrote in the condolence book: "On behalf of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I express deepest condolences to the people and government of Azerbaijan over the tragic plane crash. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims. May Allah grant them strength and solace in this difficult time. We stand in solidarity with Azerbaijan and share their grief." Ambassador Farhadov expressed his deep gratitude for the gesture, calling the visit a symbol of true friendship and solidarity during a difficult time. The meeting underscored the enduring fraternal ties between Pakistan and Azerbaijan, with both nations offering mutual support in times of joy and sorrow. The ICCI delegation included senior Vice President Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Executive Members, Zulqurnain Abbasi, Chaudhry, Malik Mohsin Khalid and other.—DNA

Fauji Foundation education division holds awards distribution ceremony

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Fauji Foundation Education Division proudly held its prestigious Annual Awards Distribution Ceremony 2024 at the Fauji Foundation College for Boys, New Lalazar, Rawalpindi. The event celebrated the exceptional achievements of principals, vice principals, faculty members, and students from Fauji Foundation's schools and colleges, honoring their dedication to academic excellence. Certificates and cash prizes were awarded to the high achievers. The ceremony was graced by Lt Gen Khalid Zia HI(M) (Retd), Managing Director (Welfare), as the Chief Guest. Also present were Maj Gen Muhammad



Ihsanullah HI(M) (Retd), Director Education, senior officials from Fauji Foundation Head Office, and other distinguished guests. The program featured captivating performances by students, showcasing their creativity and skill. Lt Gen Khalid Zia commended the students for their remarkable

efforts and praised the faculty for their unwavering dedication to nurturing talent and maintaining high standards of education. In his address, he emphasized the pivotal role of education in shaping future leaders and reaffirmed Fauji Foundation's commitment to fostering excellence across its educational institutions. Maj Gen Muhammad Ihsanullah underscored the importance of instilling values in future generations. "Education is not just about academics; it's about shaping responsible and compassionate individuals who will lead our nation forward," he noted.

Import of pulses grew 0.87% in 5 months

ISLAMABAD: The imports of leguminous vegetables (pulses) during the first five months of the current financial year grew 0.87 per cent compared to the imports of the corresponding period last year. During the period from July-November, 2024 over 582,350 metric tons of pulses valued at \$406.438 million were imported as compared to the imports of 640,180 metric tons worth \$402.917 million of the same period of the last year, according to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. On month on month basis, the import of pulses grew by 32.84 per cent in November 2024 as against the same month of the last year and 149,164 metric tons of pulses costing \$106.637 million were imported as compared to the imports of 123,516 metric tons worth \$81.776 million. However, during the last five months of the current financial year, the imports of wheat into the country reduced by 100 per cent compared to the same period last year, it added. Meanwhile, imports of soya bean oil into the country during the period under review decreased by 10.01 per cent and palm oil increased by 7.13 per cent as compared to the imports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-November 2024, over 74,385 metric tons of soya bean costing \$73.647 million were imported to tackle the local requirements as against the imports of 74,745 metric tons valued at \$81.840 million in the same period of last year. On month on month basis, the import of edible oil including soya bean and palm into the country during the month of November 2024 grew by 113.99 per cent and 11.69 per cent respectively as compared to the imports of the same month of last year. In November 2024, over 15,045 metric tons of soya bean valued at \$15.138 million were imported as against the imports of 6,410 metric tons worth \$7.047 million in the same month of the last year. During the last month of the current financial year over 234,885 metric tons of palm oil costing \$235.590 million were imported as compared to the imports of 231,701 metric tons valued at \$210.932 million of the same month of the last year. It is worth mentioning here that the food group exports from the country during the first 05 months of the current financial year grew by 19.58 per cent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-November, 2024, food commodities worth \$3.155 billion were exported as compared to the exports of \$2.638 billion of the same period of the last year. On the other hand, the food group imports into the country during the period under review decreased by 11.13 per cent and it was recorded at \$2.977 billion as against the imports of \$3.350 billion of the corresponding period of the last year Pindi Board's announced.—DNA

SECP ceases guarantees business of 'Crescent Star Insurance Limited'

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has ceased the guarantee business of Crescent Star Insurance Limited (Crescent Star) through a Direction, under section 60 of the Insurance Ordinance, 2000 (Ordinance). The Crescent Star had issued guarantees amounting to Rs. 229 billion without obtaining requisite collateral and any valid reinsurance arrangements, said a press release issued here. In order to ensure adherence to due process of law and provide Crescent Star with an opportunity to explain its position regarding the highlighted violations of the regulatory framework, a notice was issued to it on January 31, 2024. However, the company challenged the notice in the Honourable Islamabad High Court. The Court did not grant any relief to Crescent Star and directed it to participate in the proceedings initiated by SECP. The SECP provided six opportunities of hearings to Crescent Star and four written responses were submitted by it during the proceedings. Despite these opportunities, Crescent Star failed to demonstrate the requisite compliance with regulatory requirements to carry on guarantees business including obtaining proper collateral and reinsurance arrangements. Crescent Star's With regard to claim of Crescent Star to have obtained reinsurance arrangement against its guarantees business, SECP approached the concerned insurance company which categorically denied any such arrangement. This confirmed SECP's findings with regard to non-compliance with regulatory requirements to carry on the guarantees business and also exposed the misstatements of facts by Crescent Star Insurance. It was concluded that guarantees business of Crescent Star was being conducted without obtaining any requisite collateral or reinsurance cover.—APP

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Briefs

CS KP
Rustam Shah
Mohmand
passes away

PESHAWAR: Former ambassador and chief secretary KP, Rustam Shah Mohmand passed at the age of 82 due to a brief illness on Friday. According to his family sources, the funeral prayer of the late bureaucrat would be offered at 4p.m today at Shami Road Peshawar. The distinguished officer had served in different key positions for Pakistan including its Interior Secretary, Chief Secretary KP, commissioner of Afghan refugees and Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi expressed his deep sorrow and grief over the sad demise of Rustam Shah Mohmand. He said that the death of Rustam Shah Mohmand was a national loss. He said that Rustam Shah Mohmand's contributions to the country's development, foreign affairs, and administrative matters would always be remembered in golden words. "His leadership skills, commitment and sincerity made him an exemplary figure." The Governor extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family, praying that Allah Almighty may grant them patience to bear this irreparable loss. He also prayed in the highest place for the eternal mercy of the departed soul.—APP

May 9 rioters
to face
'logical end':
Aqeel

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to the Prime Minister on Law and Justice, Barrister Aqeel Malik Friday issued a stern warning on Friday, stating that individuals involved in the 9th May incident will be held accountable and face the consequences of their actions, ultimately meeting their logical end. In an interview with a private news channel, Barrister Aqeel Malik vowed to bring the mastermind and perpetrators of the May 9 violence to justice, emphasizing that law will take its course in the May 9 mayhem. Barrister Aqeel has commended the military court's decision, handed down yesterday, in connection with the May 9 incident, emphasizing that justice has been served and those responsible for inciting violence and destruction will be held accountable. Responding to a query about PTI's demand for a judicial commission, it was clarified that it is a step in the right direction for both parties to come to the negotiation table, adding, PTI is expected to present its written demands to the committee at the next meeting on January 2 and if PTI can convincingly present solid reasons to support their demands, it could be a positive development. He stated that they possess irrefutable evidence, including footage of individuals involved in the 9th May incident, however, if PTI still insists on a judicial commission, they will need to convincingly persuade the committee members.—APP

Naqvi inaugurates sector
C-14 Development Project

The Interior minister reviewed the development work in detail. He tasked the CDA to complete the development works of Sector C-14 by February 15

DNA
ISLAMABAD: In a major development, Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi on Friday inaugurated development work in Sector C-14, Islamabad, marking a significant milestone for the city's residents. It is to be noted that the booking of plots in Sector C-14 will be until December 30, while the open draw for allotment will be held on January 14. The Interior minister reviewed the development work in detail. He tasked the CDA to complete the development works of Sector C-14 by February 15. Mohsin Naqvi said that Sector C-14 is being offered exclusively for overseas Pakistanis and local residents. He stated that Sector C-14 is located at a prime location in Islamabad, which is designed for a better and peaceful lifestyle. He directed the concerned authorities to further expedite the sector development work in view of the growing population of Islamabad and to complete development works in all pending sectors. Visiting the newly constructed site, the Interior Minister directed the CDA authorities to ensure timely possession of plots to the allottees after the completion of the development works. He also ordered the CDA authorities to take indiscriminate action against the encroachment mafia. He said that no concession should be made against the encroachment mafia on the land of Margalla Hills National Park. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa briefed the Interior Minister regarding the development works. While



giving the briefing, he said that special priority will be given to Overseas Pakistanis in Sector C-14. He said that bookings can be made till December 30, 2024, to get plots in Sector C-14. Chairman CDA Muhammad

Ali Randhawa also briefed the Interior Minister regarding the development works of Sector I-12. Chairman CDA said that the development works of Sector I-12 are in the final stages of completion and possession

will be handed over to the allottees soon. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa and senior concerned officials were also accompanying the Interior Minister during the visit.

Al-Shifa specialists treat
rare eye tumour

DNA

RAWALPINDI: A team of specialists at the Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital have successfully treated a rare eye tumour to save the vision and life of a newborn. Mirha Ameer from Gujjar Khan, just 2 hours old, faced a life-threatening congenital eye tumour, risking both her vision and life. After a week of consulting different hospitals, the parents eventually came to Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital for assistance. The tumour was three times larger than the size of her eyeball. It was in a life-threatening condition, prompting doctors to urgently perform



complex surgery, which continued for two and half hours and concluded successfully. Prof. Dr. Tayyab Afghani informed media persons that Mirha's life and 50% of her sight have also been preserved. He said that it was a rare case of a congenital tumour but after complete treatment, the child could live a normal life. He added that congenital eye tumours

are present at birth and can affect the orbit or the eye. Afghani said that congenital eye tumours could cause vision problems or disfigurement if left untreated. They can also spread to the brain, optic nerve, and the rest of the body, becoming life-threatening. The symptoms include blurry vision, seeing floaters or flashes of light, shadows or dark spots in vision, light sensitivity, lumps on the eyelid or other parts of the eye, changes in the shape of the pupil, bulging, redness, or swelling of the eye, changes in the way the eye moves, and pain in the eye. He said that over the past three years, the Al-Shifa Eye Cancer Cen-

tre has successfully performed 2,500 sessions of chemotherapy procedures for children who have been diagnosed with eye cancer. Genetic testing can reduce the incidence of childhood eye cancer. Dr. Afghani said that 2000 children with eye cancer have been registered, of whom 500 have fully recovered. The Al-Shifa Eye Cancer Center caters to surgery, chemotherapy, and rehabilitation under one roof, free of cost. Dr. Tayyab Afghani, Dr. Mansoorul Haq, Ms. Shumaila Niazi, Ms. Umera Asad, Mr. Asfandyar Amirzada, and Muhammad Tariq are among the team members who performed the difficult surgery.

Tax evasion to be
dealt with iron hand:
Khurram warned

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to the Finance Minister Khurram Shahzad Friday announced that FBR has collaborated with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to present a report aimed at tackling non-filers and underfilers with a focus on tightening laws to prevent tax theft and steer the economy in the right direction. In an exclusive interview with a private news channel, Khurram revealed that the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has launched a nationwide crackdown on tax evaders. As part of this effort, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has collaborated with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to identify and prosecute individuals who have failed to pay their taxes, he said, adding that this joint initiative aims to root out tax evasion and ensure compliance with tax laws across the country. He said that the present government has adopted a zero-tolerance stance towards tax evasion, with authorities vowing to take stern action against those who fail to comply with tax laws, leaving no quarter for tax evaders to escape the full force of the law. Khurram further mentioned that non-filers will face severe restrictions, including being barred from buying vehicles and properties, prohibited from investing in mutual funds, facing difficulties in opening and managing current bank accounts and experiencing hurdles in cash withdrawals and deposits, ultimately making it imperative for them to file their tax returns. To tackle under-filing, the government plans to introduce a digital platform that minimizes human involvement. This digital interface will utilize advanced algorithms to detect discrepancies between declared assets and their actual value, ensuring greater accuracy and transparency in tax filings, he added. Khurram disclosed that the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in collaboration with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has successfully identified approximately 4.9 million wealthy and affluent individuals who will be brought into the tax net. This initiative aims to ensure that those who can afford to pay taxes do so, without imposing additional burdens on low-income individuals, he added.—DNA

Govt capable
to sail through
external
pressures:
Senator

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-N Senator Afnan Ullah Friday termed Pakistan's sovereignty 'non-negotiable' said the country would not tolerate any interference in its internal affairs. In an interview with a private news channel, Afnan said the government would not succumb to any external pressure. The PML-N Senator said the country successfully navigated through similar threats in the past and recalled a strong response by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif with his decision of nuclear tests as a deterrent. He criticized PTI's founder Imran Khan for seemingly relying on external powers to take him out of jail. PTI is putting national interests at risk in order to conceal its own wrongdoings, he added. Stressing the need for political stability and unity, he said, PTI needed to prioritize national interests over personal matters. The approach of addressing the country's pressing issues, such as economic growth, security and social development would ultimately benefit the country and its citizens, he said.—APP

Import of pulses grew
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149,164 metric tons of pulses costing \$106.637 million were imported as compared to the imports of 123,516 metric tons worth \$81.776 million. However, during the last five months of the current financial year, the imports of wheat into the country reduced by 100 percent compared to the same period last year, it added. Meanwhile, imports of soya bean oil into the country during the period under review decreased by 10.01 per cent and palm oil increased by 7.13 per cent as compared to the imports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-November 2024, over 74,385 metric tons of soya

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current financial year over 234,885 metric tons of palm oil costing \$235.590 million were imported as compared to the imports of 231,701 metric tons valued at \$210.932 million of the same month of the last year. It is worth mentioning here that the food group exports from the country during the first 05 months of the current financial year grew by 19.58 per cent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-November, 2024, food commodities worth \$3.155 billion were exported as compared to the exports of \$2.638 billion of the same period of the last year.—DNA

Prince Asfandyar: A forgotten
hero with enduring legacy

IHSAN UL HAQ

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's history is filled with unsung heroes, and among them stands Prince Miangul Asfandyar Aurangzeb, a man whose life was tragically cut short in a bomb blast on December 28, 2007. Known for his elegance, charm, and dedication to the people of Swat, Asfandyar's legacy remains largely forgotten, overshadowed by national tragedies that unfolded around the same time. Yet, his contributions to education and development are still remembered by those whose lives he touched. Asfandyar was not just another politician; he was a figure who embodied grace and strength, a true prince in both name and spirit. With a background in civil engineering, he was elected as a member of Parliament, and later served as the Education Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He was admired not only for his royal lineage but also for his humble demeanor, kindness, and tireless service to his people. On that fateful December day, Asfandyar was in

Manglawar, a town on the outskirts of Mingora city, having just concluded an election gathering. In a rush to reach Shingrai village for Friday prayers, he was killed in a devastating bomb blast that took the lives of nine others. The violence claimed not just his life, but the lives of innocent civilians, some of whom were identified only by their shoes or watches. It was a heartbreaking day for Swat, compounded by the previous day's tragic assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi, a national event that dominated the media and, unfortunately, overshadowed Asfandyar's demise. Born to Prince Miangul Amir Zeb and the grandson of Swat's last ruler, Major General (H) Miangul Abdul Haq Jehanzeb, Asfandyar came from a bloodline rich in history. His education began at Public School Sangota in Swat, followed by Army Burn Hall College in Abbottabad and a degree in Civil Engineering from Peshawar University. Asfandyar's political journey started in 1997 when he contested elections as a member provincial assembly candidate for the Pakistan Muslim

League-Nawaz (PML-N). He quickly made a mark as the Education Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where he spearheaded the establishment of numerous schools, colleges, and universities. His work helped uplift the province and played a crucial role in defending Pakistan against those who sought to criticize its potential. As District Nazim from 2003, following the death of Dr. Mahboob ur Rahman, Asfandyar carried forward his grandfather's legacy of progress and development. Swat, once a remote and underserved region, saw the construction of schools, hospitals, roads, and other vital infrastructure, all thanks to his tireless efforts. Despite his monumental contributions, Asfandyar's death went largely unrecognized, failing to receive the acknowledgement it truly deserved. Fazal Mahmood Rokhan, a poet and historian from Swat, talking to APP lamented the lack of acknowledgement for Asfandyar's work. "He deserved to be remembered for his services to the district and the province. But no road, no school, or university bears

his name," said Rokhan.

Rokhan further recalled the harrowing aftermath of Asfandyar's death, describing how his body, disfigured and mutilated, lay unceremoniously in Saidu Sharif Hospital for an entire night. "It is almost unimaginable for someone as dignified and handsome as him," Rokhan said. "The other victims were buried in pieces, but Asfandyar, a man who gave so much to his people, was treated with such disregard." The tragedy of Asfandyar's departure is not just in the way he was lost, but in how his legacy has faded from memory. As Fazal Mahmood Rokhan put it, "It is a tragedy after a tragedy. His death, like his life, went unnoticed by the powers that be." Today, 17 years after that tragic day, it is crucial that we remember Prince Miangul Asfandyar Aurangzeb, not just for his royal lineage, but for the dignity and devotion with which he served his people. It is time to restore his rightful place in the annals of history and honour the memory of one of Swat's most beloved sons.

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A call from Gaza

Is anyone alive? Is anyone hearing me?" This is not a call to the humanity that has deafened its ears and closed its eyes since October 7, 2023 ignoring all the brutality and barbarism perpetrated by Israel against the people of Gaza. Rather, it is a cry from a grieving father, calling from the depths of his wounded heart, hoping that the echo will return to him with a thread of hope, allowing him to hear the voice of any member of his family who vanished under the rubble of their home, destroyed by the occupation army's bombardment. This call shakes hearts, steals emotions and feelings, and explodes like a bomb of despair in the face of the Arab, Islamic, and global helplessness and betrayal. It reverberates in the ears of martyrs beneath the rubble and in the ears of the dead conscience in this unjust world: "Is anyone hearing? Is anyone hearing me? Oh Lord, oh Lord, oh Lord, we have no one but You, oh Lord, we have no one but You, oh Lord." The scene of the devastated father, unable to hold back his tears, raising his plea to the heavens after the earth has tightened and help has become scarce, is repeated in Gaza dozens of times every day, without the world moving in response to the convoys of martyrs, among whom tens of thousands have departed, leaving behind tales of loss and pain that their loved ones endure with bitter deprivation and oppression, in front of the Israeli criminal war machine that has spared neither young nor old, nor women nor youth, and has shown no regard for the entire world. Another horrifying image circulated widely shows a composed father, bearing the pain and agony, carrying his martyr child in his arms, holding onto patience and hope despite the bitterness of loss. He says, with words that are wounded by pain: "This is expected from the Israelis. They are not humans but cowards. By God, you will fall, and we will triumph over you, Netanyahu. I swear by God that I say this, victory will be near. By God, the blood of the martyrs will not go in vain. By God, with their blood, we will live in this world and the hereafter." Between a father searching for his family's martyrs to embrace them in farewell and another carrying his beloved child, a martyr, the chapters of tragedy do not stop. Gaza families have tasted every kind of loss and pain. Those who did not die from the bombardment or under the rubble have perished from the severe cold, as four infants in Gaza were martyred on Thursday morning due to the freezing temperatures over the past 48 hours. According to medical sources, the ages of the four newborn martyrs range from 4 to 21 days, indicating that food insecurity among mothers has led to new health issues in infants. Ninety percent of the population in Gaza has been living a tragic life in tents for the second consecutive year, where their nights are like their days, with no water, food, medicine, or heating to protect their bodies from the harsh winter cold. With American support, the Israeli occupation has been waging a campaign of genocide against Gaza since October 7, 2023, resulting in over 153,000 martyrs and injured, and approximately 11,000 missing, amid massive destruction of infrastructure and famine that has killed dozens of children and the elderly, marking one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world. Thousands of martyrs and injured remain unreachable from under the rubble due to ongoing bombardments and dangerous field conditions, amidst a suffocating blockade of the Strip and strict restrictions on the entry of fuel and urgent vital aid to alleviate the catastrophic humanitarian situation.



Pathological imperialism

THREATENING to retake the Panama Canal and forcibly buy Greenland from Denmark. Warning Nato members he will withdraw US military protection unless they commit to spending 5 per cent of their gross domestic product on defence and start buying more American oil and gas at inflated prices. Insulting Canada by calling it the 51st state of the United States and its prime minister a state governor. Is it just Donald Trump being Trump? Previously, the president-elect also threatened to bomb fentanyl labs and deploy special forces to take out cartel bosses in Mexico, which may be construed as a warning to invade another sovereign country and ally. His latest antics even before his return to the White House have galvanised his "Make America Great Again" fans. Others are amused, thinking it's more sound bites than bullets and bombs, though they can never be sure. The foreign policy establishment in Washington is reportedly aghast. These are the people used to rhapsodising about the US-led rules-based world order and "taking care" of friends and allies. Mainstream US pundits, both liberal democrats and old-style conservatives, warn Trump is undermining the pillars of American foreign policy, presumably policies and stances they themselves have advocated and now look set to be overturned. "Trump's erratic foreign policy to meet 'a world on fire'," runs a Reuters headline. "Favouring Foes Over Friends, Trump Threatens to Undo International Order", says another in The New York Times. It's too early to say what the yellow-haired one will do. But the cavalier manner in which he threatens allies and challenges some sacred cows of US foreign policy is usually attributed to arrogance and ignorance. That's true to a large extent; the guy is arrogant and ignorant. On the other hand, foreign policy is not quantum mechanics, even if its practitioners and scholars like to make people think only they have the wisdom and intellect to formulate and pontificate on this sacred art. Much of it is just about rigging the rules and regulations in the international arenas, such as trade and finance, to turn them in your favour, and bullying or dominating others, with wars or subversion if necessary. It's all done, at least ideally, in the gentler language of diplomacy, so family newspapers may print the stories even if you are committing or enabling the commitment of extreme violence and mass murder abroad. All that comes with the hypocritical pretence that the US alone has legitimate global interests, extending to the two poles of the Earth and deep into the oceans, way up into outer space and across cyberspace. What's good for America is good for the world, or at least for freedom and democracy, Western values and civilisation. If so, then anything the US does is justified by its own interests and national security, which over time have become ill-defined and arbitrary. However, it's still necessary to keep up appearances by claiming a nobility of purpose. Trump has no time or temperament for all that. He is an amoralist but no hypocrite. He is, in some way, more honest because he is totally transactional. In his business and personal life, he says or does something outrageous because he knows he can get away with it, and by extending the same principle to global politics, because America can get away with it. Lying and telling the truth are indistinguishable for Trump. He is truly post-truth because the truths and values as ordained by the ruling elites are increasingly being challenged, both domestically and abroad.

The paradox of China's global role

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Most importantly, China's rise has unsettled nearly all of its neighbors, from Japan to India to Australia. Xi's foreign policy has dramatically increased these countries' fears, prompting many of them to fundamentally reconsider their foreign policies. Ever since the June 2020 border skirmish that left dozens dead, India appears to be pursuing a long-term strategy to balance China. Despite its heavy reliance on the Chinese market, Australia now views China as its main adversary, particularly given Beijing's many cyber-attacks on Australian targets, and has called for a global probe into how Beijing mishandled the first Covid-19 outbreak

CHINA'S rise as a global superpower has been accompanied by a perceived sense of ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding its foreign policy strategy. China has articulated its foreign policy objectives through official channels its actual intentions and methods have been subject to speculation and debate among policymakers and scholars. This has led to concerns about China's long-term goals and the potential implications for global security and stability. The elusive nature of China's strategy can be attributed to several factors, including the country's historical and cultural context, its complex domestic politics, and its rapidly evolving economic and military power. China's emphasis on non-interference and sovereignty combined with its assertive actions in the South China Sea and elsewhere, has created a paradoxical image of a country that is simultaneously defensive and expansionist. Economic development: China has been pursuing a policy of economic growth and modernization for several decades, and this remains a key component of its strategy. The country has become a major player in the global economy, with a focus on exports, foreign investment, and technology development. China is also working to modernize its military, investing heavily in new technologies and capabilities such as cyber warfare, space technology, and artificial intelligence. This is seen as part of China's broader effort to assert itself as a major global power. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a massive infrastructure development project that aims to connect China with countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure. The BRI is seen as a way for China to extend its economic and political influence beyond its borders. China is also engaged in a range of diplomatic efforts, including building alliances and partnerships with other countries, promoting its own version of international law and order, and using soft power to influence public opinion and perceptions of China. China's strategy is also shaped by its Communist ideology and its view of itself as a major power with a distinct political and cultural identity. This is reflected in China's domestic policies, such as its strict controls on the media and the internet, as well as its efforts to promote its own version of international human rights and democracy. China's foreign policy has also become more ambitious under Xi Jinping. The country's growing belligerence marks a break with its earlier passivity, shaped by Deng Xiaoping's proverb "Hide your strength, seize your time". The military build-up in particular, shows that China is pursuing a long-term plan. Deng advised other Chinese leaders to wait and see in the 1990s, the country was impoverished with a weak economy. This economy has grown by 800% and now has a large population. China has bided its time and expanded its power, and today it has aspired to a broader regional and global role, as do all great powers with escalation of wealth and power. Since 1945, the great states that have risen to prosperity and

prominence have been Washington's closest allies, if not quasi-protectors: Germany, Japan, and South Korea. A typically disruptive feature of international politics the rise of new powers was therefore unusually benign for the United States. Not only is the People's Republic of China much larger than the rising powers of its predecessors it has always been outside the US alliance structure and sphere of influence. American foreign policy from both parties has become adapted to a world in which America is the undisputed leader. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright has explained "We are America; we are the indispensable nation," she said. "We stand tall and look further into the future than other countries." In 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed in a statement that would surely infuriate any Chinese citizen that the United States and its allies needed to put China "in its rightful place." China's sin, according to Pompeo, is that it spends more on its military than it needs on its defenses. The same, of course, applies to the United States and France, Russia, Great Britain and other large countries. In fact, a useful definition of a great power is a country that cares about more than its own immediate security. The political climate in Washington always pushes policymakers to be "hard" rather than "soft" a dangerous way of conducting international affairs. The real question is, can they be smart instead of stupid? America's new hawkish consensus on China is awkward, without any discussion of how its target will respond. Beijing has its own hawks who have warned for years that the US wants to hold China down and even seek regime change in Beijing. More importantly, the Trump administration's stance has validated these voices, giving them the leverage to encourage the very kind of aggressive and destabilizing behavior in China that US policy seeks to prevent. This dynamic, with each side arm reinforcing the other, increases tension and increases the risk of collision. It's important to note that Trump's tough tactics have achieved none of his goals from closing the US trade deficit to winning Beijing's support in dealing with North Korea and Iran. In the result China is being more aggressive on the outside and more repressive at home. American determination is rooted in the fear that China might one day take over the entire world. This is a dangerous fear because in the history, when a prominent power perceives that it is losing ground, it often anticipates and exploits the "window of danger" that its rise does not fall. It was this kind of rationality that drove European politicians to war in 1914. During its rise Washington neither succeeded in conquering the world, the Soviet Union, Japan or Afghanistan despite of some horrible events. On the other hand, China with all its successes and strengths is facing internal challenges from a shrinking population to a mountain of debt. The Communist Party also faces an uncertain political future. Despite a decade of political repression on the mainland, it is true that the rise of the middle class is fueling aspirations. Most importantly, China's rise has unsettled nearly all of its neighbors, from Japan to India to Australia. Xi's for-

ign policy has dramatically increased these countries' fears, prompting many of them to fundamentally reconsider their foreign policies. Ever since the June 2020 border skirmish that left dozens dead, India appears to be pursuing a long-term strategy to balance China. Despite its heavy reliance on the Chinese market, Australia now views China as its main adversary, particularly given Beijing's many cyber-attacks on Australian targets, and has called for a global probe into how Beijing mishandled the first Covid-19 outbreak. Japan revived the Trans-Pacific Partnership, bringing other countries on board and ensuring implementation of the agreement. Even Vietnam, wary of its larger neighbor, has embarked on what was once unthinkable: if not an alliance but a military partnership with its old enemy the United States. Taiwan's people have re-elected an anti-China president and are turning more hostile to the mainland, making military options more difficult and expensive for Beijing. China's greatest geostrategic weakness has always been its abundance of neighboring countries who oppose his rise. Far from addressing this deficiency, Xi's policies have exacerbated it. China is emerging today but embedded in a vast continent with hostile neighbors who are becoming more hostile. China has been pursuing a strategy of economic expansion to become a global economic power. Its emphasis on infrastructure development, technological advancement, and industrial upgrading has enabled it to achieve impressive economic growth over the past few decades. The outcome of this strategy is that China has become the world's second-largest economy, and its economic influence is felt globally. China has been actively promoting its cultural and political values through soft power projection. Its focus on cultural diplomacy, education, and media has helped to increase its influence in the world. The outcome of this strategy is that China is increasingly seen as a global leader in certain areas, such as climate change, technology, and development. China has been increasing its military capabilities in recent years, including the modernization of its armed forces and the expansion of its naval presence. The outcome of this strategy is that China is becoming a more assertive player in regional and global security issues, which has raised concerns among its neighbors and other countries. China has been expanding its geopolitical influence by developing close relationships with other countries through its Belt and Road Initiative and other economic and diplomatic initiatives. The outcome of this strategy is that China is becoming an increasingly important player in global politics, challenging the traditional dominance of Western powers. The outcome of China's elusive strategy is complex and multifaceted, and its long-term effects are difficult to predict. While China has achieved significant success in some areas, such as economic expansion and soft power projection, its increasing assertiveness and geopolitical ambitions have also raised concerns among other countries.

The Syrian refugees in a post-Assad era

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

Economic reintegration poses another major hurdle. With high unemployment and limited job opportunities, returnees may struggle to support themselves and their families. Skilled workers may find that their professions are no longer viable due to the destruction of infrastructure or shifts in the economy. Farmers returning to rural areas may face land that has been rendered infertile by neglect or conflict. In urban areas, small businesses that once thrived may no longer have a customer base or the resources to restart operations

THE Syrian refugee crisis is one of the most harrowing humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st century. Triggered by a civil war that erupted in 2011, the conflict displaced more than 13 million Syrians, half of the country's pre-war population. Among these, approximately 6.8 million sought refuge abroad, primarily in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, as well as in Europe and beyond. Their plight became a symbol of human suffering, resilience, and the challenges of global solidarity. Now, with the fall of Bashar Assad, some Western countries have initiated efforts to repatriate Syrian refugees, citing changing conditions on the ground. However, the complexities of Syria's devastated economy, crumbled infrastructure, and societal scars warrant a more cautious approach to repatriation. During the civil war, many Syrians risked perilous journeys across the Mediterranean to seek safety in Europe. Images of overcrowded boats and tragic drownings stirred global attention, yet responses varied widely. Some countries opened their doors, while others closed borders or erected barriers to limit the influx. The refugee crisis underscored profound challenges: the strain on host countries' resources; the difficulty of integrating large refugee populations; and the enduring trauma faced by those who fled. Syrians struggled to find stable employment, access to healthcare, and secure education for their children. Despite these hardships, many often clung to the hope of returning home. While the fall of Assad marks a significant turning point, Syria appears to be far from ready to accommodate the return of millions of its displaced citizens. The war's toll on the country's economy and infrastructure is staggering. Entire cities lie in ruins, with essential services like water, electricity, and healthcare severely compromised. According to estimates, rebuilding Syria could take hundreds of billions of dollars and decades of effort. Roads, schools, hospitals and homes must be reconstructed before large-scale returns can be viable. The economic landscape is equally dire. Syria's GDP has contracted sharply since the war began, and industries that once

provided livelihoods for millions have collapsed. Agriculture, a cornerstone of the pre-war economy, has been devastated by conflict and climate change. Many factories and businesses have been destroyed or abandoned, leaving a vacuum of employment opportunities. Inflation and currency devaluation have rendered basic goods unaffordable for much of the population. For those who do return, the challenges are formidable. Housing is one of the most immediate and pressing issues. Many refugees' homes have been destroyed, seized, or occupied by others. Legal disputes over property rights are likely to be widespread, particularly in a country where documentation was lost or destroyed during the war. Economic reintegration poses another major hurdle. With high unemployment and limited job opportunities, returnees may struggle to support themselves and their families. Skilled workers may find that their professions are no longer viable due to the destruction of infrastructure or shifts in the economy. Farmers returning to rural areas may face land that has been rendered infertile by neglect or conflict. In urban areas, small businesses that once thrived may no longer have a customer base or the resources to restart operations. Access to basic services is another significant concern. Healthcare facilities are scarce and overwhelmed, with shortages of staff, equipment, and medicine. Schools have been destroyed or repurposed. Refugees returning to such conditions may find that their quality of life is no better — and perhaps worse — than in the countries where they sought asylum. In addition, the psychological toll of return cannot be overlooked. Many refugees have endured profound trauma, from witnessing violence to losing loved ones. Returning to a country that still bears the scars of war may exacerbate these mental health challenges. Support systems, such as counseling and community networks, are limited or non-existent in many parts of Syria. Despite these challenges, many Syrians hope that Syria can one day reclaim stability, security, and prosperity. After 13 years of relentless conflict, the prospect of peace may offer a glimmer of possibility for millions of Syrians longing for normalcy. With time, the reconstruc-

tion of infrastructure, the revival of the economy, and the healing of societal divisions can hopefully pave the way for a brighter future. The rebuilding of Syria's infrastructure will be a monumental task, but it is essential for enabling refugees to return and rebuild their lives. Roads, bridges, and public services must be restored to connect communities and facilitate economic activity. Schools and hospitals must be reconstructed to provide education and healthcare, laying the foundation for a healthier and more prosperous society. Investments in renewable energy and modern technology could help Syria leapfrog some development challenges, creating opportunities for innovation and growth. As stability takes hold, the Syrian economy has the potential to recover and even thrive. Agriculture can be revitalized through investment in irrigation and sustainable practices. Industries such as manufacturing and construction can provide jobs and drive economic growth. Tourism, once a major contributor to Syria's economy, could gradually rebound as historical sites are restored and security improves. The entrepreneurial spirit of the Syrian people, evident in the diaspora, can play a crucial role in rebuilding the nation. Social healing will be equally important. Programs aimed at reconciliation and community building can help bridge divides and foster a sense of unity. Education will be key to equipping the next generation with the skills and knowledge needed to rebuild their country. Cultural and artistic initiatives can celebrate Syria's rich heritage and inspire a sense of shared identity. While the road ahead is long and fraught with challenges, the resilience of the Syrian people offers hope. For those who have endured unimaginable hardship, the dream of returning to a safe and thriving homeland is a powerful motivator. With patience and perseverance, many Syrians hope that their country can rise from the ashes of war, offering its citizens the security, stability, and opportunities they deserve. The international community will undoubtedly watch as the Syrian people work toward their hope of a brighter future, determined to rebuild their lives and their nation.

Briefs

No political leader's desire...

FROM PAGE 01 political interest then the system of self-accountability comes into action," he said. However, he noted, during a military trial, the suspect is entitled to all legal rights including receiving counsel service and presenting evidence and the same goes for Faiz Hamid. Terming the Hamid's case 'sensitive', he said that subjudice and sensitive matters were linked to it, therefore "unwarranted analysis and discussion should be avoided at this time." "Pakistan has fought a long war against terrorism and is still fighting. It has rendered highly valued sacrifices in this fight," he said. He also emphasised that several high-profile terrorists were neutralised in these operations, marking a critical achievement in the fight against extremism. Additionally, 73 most-wanted terrorists were eliminated, further strengthening the nation's resolve to eradicate terrorism in all its forms, he added. Lt Gen Chaudhry said that two suicide bombers were also apprehended, while 14 wanted terrorists surrendered to the authorities. He further shared that 383 officers and soldiers have embraced martyrdom in the ongoing fight against terrorism.

PTI calls for transparency in 'justice'

FROM PAGE 01 Military courts undermine both justice and the constitutional framework of the state. "That is why," he added, "only the decisions by independent constitutional courts are recognized and respected globally." The PTI spokesperson further argued that the root cause of unrest in the country lies in flawed narratives and actions. Describing the official stance as "deeply divisive and unrealistic," he warned that such stance pits the public against state institutions and fuels conflict. Akram also said, "Criticism of flawed policies and public expression of opinion are being labeled as 'rebellion' or 'anti-state.' This destructive trend is detrimental to Pakistan."

PPP sees 'conspiracy' behind...

FROM PAGE 01 "PTI founder should clarify his position about these statements." The PPP leader wondered that why those who had been issuing statements against Pakistan's nuclear programme are now raising their voices for Khan's release. He said that PTI and its founder should condemn these statements. "There is an impression that a certain lobby wants to bring a government [in the country] that is ready to make a deal on anything [including nuclear programme]. Stressing the need for making consensus decision, the PPP chairman said that PML-N-led government doesn't have mandate to take unilateral decisions.

Kabul must take...

FROM PAGE 01 operate against Pakistan can't go simultaneously, he remarked. He said that the armed forces and the law enforcement agencies of Pakistan were ready at all-times to ensure the country's peace and security. A few days ago, 16 Frontier Corps (FC) personnel were martyred and the forces eliminated also several terrorists in North Waziristan operations on Thursday, in which an army major was also martyred. Referring to the 17th anniversary of her martyrdom observed on the day, the prime minister remembered Benazir Bhutto as a courageous lady with political sagacity and acumen. He paid tribute to the late former prime minister saying that she was the first female prime minister of the Islamic world, and always believed in political coexistence and the same approach led to the signing of the Charter of Democracy with Mian Nawaz Sharif which was later endorsed by all political parties.

Army wins Combaxx-Roshan National team women's title

In the men's category, Wapda won the gold medal, Army silver, SNGPL and Punjab bronze medals while Sindh finished fifth, Balochistan sixth, Railways seventh and Navy eighth position

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Army clinches the women's title in the Combaxx-Roshan National Team Squash Championship 2024 that concluded at the Pakistan Navy Roshan Khan Jahangir Khan Squash Complex. In the women's final, Army showcased a dominant performance, defeating Wapda 2-0 to claim the title. Faiza Zafar set the tone with a hard-fought win against Mehwish Ali (14-12, 11-7, 11-9) in a 22-minute battle. Zaynab Khan and Madina Zafar followed with clinical victories, ensuring Army's gold medal. Sindh and Punjab shared the bronze medals, while Balochistan finished in fifth place. In the men's category, Wapda won the gold medal, Army silver, SNGPL and Punjab bronze medals while Sindh finished fifth, Balochistan sixth, Railways seventh and Navy eighth position. The award distribution ceremony was graced by squash legend and former world champion Jahangir Khan, who accompanied by Umar Saeed, CEO of Combaxx Sports presented medals and trophies to the players and organizing committee members. The closing ceremony was attended by notable personalities including Lieutenant Commander Muhammad Umar, Zubair



Macha (GM Combaxx Sports) and Naveed Alam (Tournament Referee). Speaking on the occasion, Jahangir Khan praised the en-

thusiasm and commitment demonstrated by the players throughout the championship. He advised the young athletes to remain

focused on their game and nurture their talent to become world-class players capable of reclaiming Pakistan's lost glory in squash.

Liverpool come from behind to secure win over Leicester

The victory extends Liverpool's unbeaten run to 13 matches

LONDON: Liverpool came back after conceding early to beat Leicester City 3-1 at Anfield on Thursday and open a seven-point lead at the top of the Premier League. Struggling Leicester took a shock sixth minute lead through Jordan Ayew but lived a charmed life until Cody Gakpo equalized on the stroke of halftime. Liverpool then put Leicester under siege straight from the break and took just four minutes into the second half to go ahead through Curtis Jones before Mohamed Salah made sure of the points with a superb 82nd-minute finish. The vic-

tory extended their unbeaten league run to 13 games and advanced Liverpool to 42 points at the top of the standings. They also have a game in hand over second-placed Chelsea, who are on 35, as well as third-placed Nottingham Forest on 34. On a misty night in Liverpool, Leicester silenced the Anfield crowd with their early goal, as Steph Mavididi's run down the left culminated in a square cross into the penalty area that found Ayew, who used his strength to see off the challenge of Andy Robertson and then turn to slot home. Robertson came close to

atoning when his header hit the upright in the 25th minute and a curling left-footed shot from Salah struck the crossbar in the 45th minute. Seconds later Gakpo cut in from the left and struck a superb curling effort beyond Leicester goalkeeper Jakub Stolarczyk for a deserved equalizer. "It sounds weird, but I think we had a really good start," said Liverpool manager Arne Slot. "But then one moment where we underestimated the situation led to a goal. You have to work really hard to come back in the game, and it really helped to score the equaliz-

er just before half-time." Jones' goal came after Liverpool moved the ball around in tight spaces before Alexis Mac Allister's square pass was steered in by the Englishman. There was a lengthy VAR check before the goal was confirmed and a similarly long wait for a check when Gakpo found the net again in the 67th minute. That was eventually ruled offside. Salah's strike was another classy finish as he marked his 100th home Premier League goal with a characteristic cut inside off the right flank, followed by an expertly placed finish across the face of the goal. "We cannot deny we are in a good place. But one of the strengths of our team is we approach each game as a new one, and that keeps us hungry and working very hard," added Gakpo. Leicester dropped into the relegation zone before kickoff after Wolverhampton Wanderers went above them earlier on Boxing Day after their 2-0 home win over Manchester United. Leicester remained on 14 points after a third successive league loss, two points above second from bottom Ipswich Town. - Agencies



Army, Wapda reaches in Women's Basketball C'ship semis

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Defending champion Wapda and Pakistan Army advanced to the semifinal round of the ongoing National Women's Basketball Championship at the Wapda Sports Complex, organized by the Pakistan Basketball Federation (PBBF). Wapda, wearing white shirts, remains unbeaten in the championship, continuing their streak of consecutive victories in the pool round by defeating Faisalabad 50-13. This win secured their spot in the semifinals. In this match, Faisalabad struggled against the defending champions. Wapda led by 19 points at halftime, which increased to a 40-point advantage by the end of the game. Hijab Fatim was the standout player for Wapda, scoring 22 points, while Sidra Hakeem added 12 points. For Faisalabad, Feroza Aslam scored 9 points. In the second match, Pakistan Army also delivered an impressive performance, defeating Islamabad by a 32-point margin. Army won 53-21, advancing to the semifinals. Aisha Dilshad and Amna Mohsin were the top scorers for Pakistan Army, with 25 and 10 points, respectively. The top eight teams participating in the five-day championship including defending champions Wapda, Karachi, Bahawalpur, Islamabad, Pakistan Army, Lahore, Hazara, and Faisalabad.

Smith's ton keep Australia on top

MELBOURNE: Australia's experienced batter Steve Smith's anchoring century, followed by late wickets left India struggling on the second day of the fourth Test at here at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) on Friday. Smith's second consecutive century set the platform for the hosts to post a daunting total of 474 before Scott Boland and Pat Cummins chipped in with two wickets each against India. Inform Smith and skipper Cummins stretched their overnight seventh-wicket partnership to 112 runs to take their team's total past the 400-run mark. Cummins had an agonizing end to his valiant knock as he fell just one run short of his well-deserved fourth Test fifty as India got a much-needed breakthrough via Ravindra Jadeja. - Agencies

BBL 2024: Hurricanes edge Strikers in high-scoring clash

The victory lifts Hurricanes to fifth in the league's standings

WEB DESK

ADELAIDE: Wicketkeeper batter Ben McDermott's swashbuckling half-century remained in the spotlight as Hobart Hurricanes edged past Adelaide Strikers in the high-scoring 13th match of BBL 2024 here at the Adelaide Oval on Friday. Put into bat first, the Hurricanes registered a massive total of 214/5 on the board, thanks to McDermott's blitz. Coming out to bat at number four with the scoreboard reading 64/2 in 6.2 overs, the right-handed batter made the most of the flamboyant start. He smashed three fours and five sixes on his way to an unbeaten 68 off 34 deliveries and top-scored for the Hurricanes. Besides him, Shai Hope and Tim David, made notable contributions, scoring 37 and 33 respectively. Jamie Overton was the standout bowler for the Strikers as he registered economical bowling figures of 2/27 in his four overs. Matthew Short,

Liam Scott and Llyod Pope, each took a wicket but were expensive. In response, the Strikers could accumulate 203/6 in their allotted 20 overs despite a flying opening partnership. Openers D'Arcy Short and Matthew Short gave the Strikers a flamboyant start to the run chase as they notched up 76 runs inside seven overs. D'Arcy, who was the core aggressor of the stand, fell victim to Billy Stanlake in the seventh over after scoring 41 off 22 deliveries, laced with five fours and two sixes. Meanwhile, Matthew was then involved in brief partnerships with Chris Lynn and Ollie Pope until eventually falling to Waqar Salamkheil in the 12th over. He remained the top-scorer for the Strikers with a 29-ball 52, comprised of three fours and four sixes. Following his dismissals, the home side lost wickets at regular intervals which eventually resulted in them falling just 11 runs short of an astounding victory. Chris Jordan led the bowling charge for the Hurricanes with two wickets, while Nikhil Chaudhary, Salamkheil, Nathan Ellis and Stanlake made one scalp apiece.

Bosch frustrates Pakistan to give South Africa lead

The hosts secure a handy first innings lead of 90 runs

CENTURION: Debutant all-rounder Corbin Bosch scored an unbeaten half-century to propel South Africa to a handy 90-run lead on the second day of the first Test against Pakistan here at the SuperSport Park on Friday. The right-handed batter dominated spirited Pakistan's bowling attack, who were fuelled with momentum after reducing the home side to 213/8. Bosch turned the tide back in the hosts' favour as he pushed their total past the 300-run mark with an unbeaten 81 off just 93 deliveries and comprised of 15 boundaries. He was involved in one-sided partnerships with tailenders Kagiso Rabada (13) and Dane Paterson (12), who also made vital contributions at the backend. Pakistan forced a comeback in the early phase of the eventful second session as the touring side took three wickets in quick succession including the prized scalp of Aiden Markram. Markram remained the top-scorer for the Proteas with a gritty 89, studded with 15 boundaries. For Pakistan, Khurram Shahzad and Naseem Shah

took three wickets each, while Aamir Jamal bagged two. Returning Mohammad Abbas and Saim Ayub shared two between them. Earlier in the day, Markram and Bavuma resumed South Africa's response to Pa-

kistan's 211 and frustrated the touring side's bowlers with a cautious stand. The duo added 70 runs for the fourth wicket until Aamir Jamal got rid of the South African captain, who made a significant con-



tribution with his 31-run knock. Markram was then involved in another important partnership for the hosts when he added 42 runs for the fifth wicket with David Bedingham. The middle-order dominated the stand with his brisk 30 off 33 deliveries before falling victim to Naseem Shah. South Africa could add two more runs to their total before the Lunch and were 180/5 in 46 overs, with Aiden Markram unbeaten on 81. For Pakistan, Khurram Shahzad bagged two wickets, while Mohammad Abbas, Jamal and Naseem shared three between them. Pakistan's playing XI: Shan Masood (c), Saim Ayub, Babar Azam, Kamran Ghulam, Mohammad Rizwan, Saud Shakeel, Salman Ali Agha, Aamir Jamal, Naseem Shah, Khurram Shahzad and Mohammad Abbas. South Africa's playing XI: Tony de Zorzi, Aiden Markram, Ryan Rickelton, Tristan Stubbs, Temba Bavuma (C), David Bedingham, Kyle Verreyne, Marco Jansen, Kagiso Rabada, Dane Paterson, and Corbin Bosch. - Agencies

AJK Assembly passes resolution against...

FROM PAGE 01 emphasised the critical role of missile technology and nuclear programme in national security, urging collective defense against foreign intervention and aggression. The resolution highlighted Pakistan's pivotal role in regional stability.

South Korea votes to impeach...

FROM PAGE 01 Speaker to step down. Most of them boycotted the vote. Han will be suspended from his duties as soon as he is officially notified by parliament. The opposition first filed an impeachment motion against Han on Thursday after he blocked the appointment of three judges that parliament had chosen to oversee Yoon's case. Korea's Constitutional Court is typically made up of a nine-member bench. At least six judges must uphold Yoon's impeachment in order for the decision to be upheld. There are currently only six judges on the bench, meaning a single rejection would save Yoon from being removed.

German president dissolves...

FROM PAGE 01 coalition without a legislative majority. He will remain in office as a caretaker chancellor until a new government is formed at a time when the country is reeling from a deadly car-ramping attack at a Christmas market last week, which has revived heated debate over security and immigration. Suspect Taleb al-Abdulmohe, a 50-year-old psychiatrist from Saudi Arabia who had lived in Germany for nearly 20 years, was a supporter of the increasingly popular far-right Alternative for Germany party (AfD), and who had promoted Islamophobic views. The president, whose post has been largely ceremonial in the post-war era, called for the election campaign to be conducted fairly and transparently, warning of "foreign influence", with specific reference to billionaire Elon Musk's social media platform, X.

President Zardari vows to protect...

FROM PAGE 01 Furthermore, he said that they have to save the country from the hands of "anti-Pakistan elements". PPP and its supporters across the country are observing the 17th death anniversary of their slain leader with great devotion and respect. A main congregation held in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, the hometown and the resting place of the Bhutto family. President Zardari, Bilawal and central and provincial leaders of the party addressed the gathering.

Cabinet okays amendments to madrassa..

FROM PAGE 01 government and his party have been resolved. "A gazette notification of the madrassa registration act passed in light of the 26th Constitutional Amendment likely to be issued in next two days," the senator said. Murtaza added that he and Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar have finalised the draft of the legislation. "The matter will be completely resolved with the issuance of the notification."

EU issues scam alert...

FROM PAGE 01 These listings, which include incorrect details about visa and consular services, also feature fraudulent phone numbers aimed at deceiving users. "This is a serious scam by criminal organizations," the EU office stressed, urging citizens to rely solely on official embassy websites for accurate contact information and service details.

Briefs

N. Korean soldier captured in Russia-Ukraine war: Seoul

SEOUL: South Korea's spy agency said Friday it had confirmed that a North Korean soldier sent to back Russia's war against Ukraine had been captured by Ukrainian forces. Pyongyang has deployed thousands of troops to reinforce Russian troops, including in the Kursk border region where Ukraine mounted a shock border incursion in August. "Through real-time information sharing with an allied country's intelligence agency, it has been confirmed that one injured North Korean soldier has been captured," South Korea's National Intelligence Service said in a statement. The soldier was captured by the Ukrainian army, an intelligence source told AFP, adding that the location where he was seized was unknown. The first confirmation of the capture of a North Korean soldier came days after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Monday that nearly 3,000 North Korean soldiers had been "killed or wounded" so far. Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) also said Monday that more than 1,000 North Korean soldiers have been killed or wounded. The JCS had also said that Pyongyang is reportedly "preparing for the rotation or additional deployment of soldiers" and supplying "240mm rocket launchers and 170mm self-propelled artillery" to the Russian army. Seoul's military believes that North Korea was seeking to modernise its conventional warfare capabilities through combat experience gained in the Russia-Ukraine war. North Korean state media said Friday that Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a New Year's message to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, saying "the bilateral ties between our two countries have been elevated after our talks in June in Pyongyang". A landmark defence pact went into effect in December after the two sides exchanged ratification documents. hailed the deal in June as a "breakthrough document".—APP

Membership of UK's anti-immigration Reform party surpasses Conservatives

LONDON: Membership of Britain's upstart anti-immigration Reform UK party has overtaken that of the centre-right Conservative Party for the first time, the party said Thursday, as Tories disputed the numbers. Party leader and Brexit figurehead Nigel Farage hailed the figure as a "historic moment". Immigration was a major issue at the ballot box at the UK's July general election which saw the Conservatives ousted after 14 years in power. The digital counter on the Reform website showed a membership tally ticking past the 131,680 figure declared by the main opposition Conservatives during its leadership election earlier this year. "The youngest political party in British politics has just overtaken the oldest political party in the world," wrote Farage on X. "Reform UK are now the real opposition." Party chairman Zia Yusuf said the milestone showed the long "stranglehold on the centre-right of British politics by the Tories has finally been broken". The last declared Conservative Party tally was the lowest on record and a drop on 2022, when there were around 172,000 members. New Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch, however, questioned the figures, accusing Farage of "fakery". She said Reform's counter was "coded to tick up automatically". Farage responded by saying he would "gladly invite" a firm to "audit our membership numbers" if the Tories did the same.—APP

China sanctions 7 companies over US military assistance to Taiwan

China objects to American military assistance for Taiwan and often imposes sanctions on related companies after a sale or aid package is announced

DNA

BEIJING: The Chinese government placed sanctions on seven companies on Friday in response to recent US announcements of military sales and aid to Taiwan, the self-governing island that China claims as part of its territory. The sanctions also come in response to the recent approval of the US government's annual defense spending bill, which a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said "includes multiple negative sections on China."

China objects to American military assistance for Taiwan and often imposes sanctions on related companies after a sale or aid package is announced.

The sanctions generally have a limited impact, because American defense companies don't sell arms or other military goods to China. The US is the main supplier of weapons to Taiwan for its defense. The seven companies being sanctioned are Insitu Inc., Hudson Technologies Co., Saronic Technologies, Inc., Raytheon Canada, Raytheon Australia, Aerokom Inc. and Oceaneering International Inc., the Foreign Ministry statement said. It said that "relevant senior executives" of

the companies are also sanctioned, without naming any. Any assets they have in China will be frozen, and organizations and individuals in China are prohibited from engaging in any activity with them, it said. US President Joe Biden last week authorized up to \$571 million in Defense Department material and services and military education and training for Taiwan. Separately, the Defense Department announced that \$295 million in military sales had been approved. The US defense bill boosts military spending to \$895 billion and directs resources toward a more confrontational approach

to China. It establishes a fund that could be used to send military resources to Taiwan in much the same way that the US has backed Ukraine. It also expands a ban on US military purchases of Chinese products ranging from drone technology to garlic for military commissaries. Zhang Xiaogang, a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson, said earlier this week that the US is hyping up the "so-called" threat from China to justify increased military spending. "US military spending has topped the world and keeps increasing every year," he said at a press conference. "This fully exposes the bel-

ligerent nature of the US and its obsession with hegemony and expansion." The Foreign Ministry statement said the US moves violate agreements between the two countries on Taiwan, interfere in China's domestic affairs and undermine the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Taiwan's government said earlier this month that China had sent dozens of ships into nearby seas to practice a blockade of the island, a move that Taiwan said undermined peace and stability and disrupted international shipping and trade. China has not confirmed or commented on the reported military activity.

Israel strikes 'infrastructure' on Syria-Lebanon border

JERUSALEM: The Israeli military reported it conducted air strikes on Friday targeting "infrastructure" on the Syrian-Lebanese border near the village of Janta, which it said was used to smuggle weapons to the armed group Hezbollah. "Earlier today, the IAF (Israeli air force) struck infrastructure that was used to smuggle weapons via Syria to the Hezbollah terrorist organization in Lebanon at the Janta crossing on the Syrian-Lebanese border," the military said in a statement. It did not specify whether the strikes were on the Syrian or Lebanese side, but they came a day after Lebanon's army accused Israel of "violation of the ceasefire agreement by attacking Lebanese sovereignty and destroying southern towns and villages." There is no official crossing point near Janta but the area is known for illegal crossings. The UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, UNIFIL, has also expressed concern over "continuing destruction" caused by Israeli forces in south Lebanon. The Israeli military said Friday's strikes were aimed at preventing weapons falling into the hands of Hezbollah, with whom it fought a land and air war for more than a year until a ceasefire was agreed upon last month. "These strikes are an additional part of the IDF's (Israeli military's) effort to target weapons smuggling operations from Syria into Lebanon, and prevent Hezbollah from re-establishing weapons smuggling routes," the military said. "The IDF will continue to act to remove any threat to the state of Israel in accordance with the understandings in the ceasefire agreement." The truce went into effect on November 27, about two months after Israel stepped up its bombing campaign and later sent troops into Lebanon following nearly a year of exchanges of cross-border fire initiated by Hezbollah over the war in Gaza.—Agencies

Driver who killed 35 in China car ramming sentenced to death

BEIJING: A man who killed 35 people in a car attack in the southern Chinese city of Zhuhai last month was sentenced to death on Friday, state media reported. On November 11, 62-year-old Fan Weiqu deliberately drove through people exercising outside a sports complex in his small SUV, the worst attack in China since 2014. He was detained at the scene with self-inflicted knife injuries and fell into a coma, police said at the time. His case was publicly tried on Friday, state broadcaster CCTV reported, with the verdict reached on the same day. The court said the defendant's motives "were extremely vile, the nature of the crime extremely egregious, the methods particularly cruel, and the consequences particularly severe, posing significant harm to society," state media said. In front of some of the victims' families, officials and members of the public, Fan pleaded guilty, it added. The court found Fan had "decided to vent his anger" over "a broken marriage, personal frustrations, and dissatisfaction with the division of property after divorce," the report said. China has this year seen a string of mass casualty incidents — from stabbings to car attacks — challenging its reputation for good public security. Some analysts have linked the incidents to growing anger and desperation at the country's slowing economy and a sense that society is becoming more stratified.—APP



ISLAMABAD: President Istehkam e Pakistan and Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan in a meeting with Ambassador H.E. Khazar Farhadov at the Azerbaijan Embassy to express sympathies on plane crash with Ambassador H.E. Khazar Farhadov

Commerce minister to visit Korea for Strengthening economic ties

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan is set to embark on an official visit to Korea to sign the Pakistan-Korea Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), marking a significant step toward enhancing bilateral economic cooperation. During his visit, the minister will engage with key stakeholders, including the Pakistani business community in Korea, prominent Korean investors, the Korean trade Minister, and other high-ranking officials, said a press release issued here on Friday. In preparation for this critical visit, Jam Kamal Khan received a comprehensive briefing today from the relevant government wings, outlining the objectives, challenges, and opportunities associated with the trip. Korea, which currently has a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India, poses a competitive landscape for Pakistan. However, the EPA is expected to not only double the trade volume between the two nations but also pave the way for a potential shift of Korean manufacturing operations to Pakistan, thanks to the country's strategic location and lower production costs. The visit also includes a meeting with the International Economic Institute, where the minister will discuss strategies to attract Korean industries to offshore their operations to Pakistan. Presently, Korea has been favoring countries like India and Vietnam for such ventures, but this visit aims to highlight Pakistan as a viable alternative. A meeting with K-EXIM Bank representatives will be held to discuss the underutilization of \$1.1 billion earmarked for 2022-2026, which could be increased to \$1.7 billion for future projects. The minister will also have engagements with the Korea Trade Association (KWEMA) leadership and major investors, including LOTTE Group and a prominent steel company. Additionally, a press interaction with the Korea Herald is scheduled. The visit will also include a trip to Korea's new capital, located two hours from Seoul, to meet the think tank president of the International Economic Institute. Plans are being made to arrange a gathering with Pakistani laborers working in Korea, recognizing their contributions to the economy and fostering stronger community ties. The schedule also allows for a two-hour shopping break. Korea's high production costs have driven its industries to seek offshore manufacturing hubs in countries like India and Vietnam.—DNA

Iran FM warns against 'destructive interference' in Syria's future

BEIJING: Iran's top diplomat warned Friday against "destructive interference" in Syria's future and said decisions should lie solely with the country's people, writing in Chinese state media as he visited Beijing. Abbas Araghchi touched down in the Chinese capital on Friday afternoon, Iranian state media reported, to begin his first official visit to the country since being appointed foreign minister. China and Iran were both supporters of ousted Syrian president Bashar Assad. Assad fled Syria this month after an Islamist-led offensive wrested city after city from his control, with the capital Damascus falling on December 8. Iran "considers the decision-making about the future of Syria to be the sole responsibility of the people... without destructive interference or foreign imposition," Araghchi wrote in a Chinese-language article in People's Daily published on Friday. He also emphasized Iran's respect for Syria's "unity, national sovereignty and territorial integrity." Iran's supreme leader — a key backer of Assad's administration — predicted on Sunday "the emergence of a strong, honorable group" that would stand against "insecurity" in Syria. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Syria's young men would "stand with strength and determination against those who have designed this insecurity and those who have implemented it, and God willing, he will overcome them."—APP

Putin says Slovakia offered to host Ukraine peace talks

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that Slovakia had offered to be a "platform" for possible peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, nearly three years since the launch of Moscow's offensive. Putin told a televised press conference Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico "said that if there are any negotiations, they would be happy to provide their country as a platform." He added that Russia was "not against it," praising Slovakia's "neutral position." Fico, one of the few European leaders to maintain ties with the Kremlin, met with the Russian president in Moscow on December 22. His visit came despite Western efforts to isolate

Putin and present a united front in support for Kyiv. Slovakia, an EU and NATO member, has already halted military aid to Ukraine since autumn 2023 under Fico's government, and called for peace talks. Fico has accused Kyiv of jeopardizing his country's supply of Russian natural gas, on which it is heavily dependent. Ukraine has said it will not renew a contract expiring at the end of this year to allow Russia gas to transit its country toward Europe, and no feasible alternative has yet been found. Ukrainians "are already punishing Europe by ending the contract to supply our gas," Putin said, adding that no new contract could be reached "in three or four days." But he

suggested he was ready to supply gas to the EU, possibly via the Yamal-Europe pipeline that transits Poland. The prospect of peace talks to end the conflict in Ukraine that began in February 2022 has grown since the re-election of Donald Trump to the White House. Trump has vowed to push for a quick deal to halt the fighting when he takes office in January. That has sparked fears in Kyiv and Europe that Ukraine could be pushed to make concessions to Moscow. Putin reiterated his vow that his country would achieve "all the objectives in Ukraine." "This is our number one task," he said, warning that Moscow was ready to again use its latest-generation Oreshnik missile,

first fired in a strike last month. Putin has repeatedly threatened to strike "decision-making centers" in Kyiv in retaliation for its use of Western-supplied long-range missiles to hit targets in Russia. He also claimed Thursday that in 2021, US President Joe Biden offered to "push back" Ukraine's entry into NATO — a move urgently sought by Kyiv but that Putin considers an unacceptable threat. "In 2021, the current President Biden offered exactly that: push back Ukraine's NATO membership by 10 to 15 years, because it was not yet ready." "I answered reasonably that 'Yes, today it is not ready. But you will prepare it for it and you will accept it.'"—Agencies

Islands, sports and spotted dogs: Five facts about Croatia

ZAGREB: Croatians will vote for a new president on Sunday, with many analysts saying incumbent left-wing populist Zoran Milanovic is a clear frontrunner. Croatia is blessed with a stunning coastline along the Adriatic Sea dotted with more than 1,000 islands and islets attracting around 20 million tourists annually. Tourism is the key pillar powering the country's economy, accounting for a fifth of gross domestic product. The sector has performed so well in recent years that Croatia has been dogged by several issues linked to the deluge of visitors, including overcrowding in the medieval walled city of Dubrovnik and a shortage of workers. The "Pearl of the Adriatic" has seen a major increase in arrivals after scenes from the Game of Thrones TV series were filmed in Dubrovnik

in 2011. Apart from the coastline, other top tourist attractions include the Istria hinterland, known for its truffles, the Velebit mountain range, and the Krka and Plitvice national parks. Many consider Croatia's sports stars as the country's biggest success, as the small nation boasts an impressive number of athletes. Its footballers made a historic run to the World Cup final in 2018 led by captain Luka Modric. They also reached the 2022 Qatar World Cup semi-finals. The water polo squad and national handball team have both scooped up world championship titles and Olympic gold medals. Tennis star Goran Ivanisevic, who won Wimbledon in 2001, and former world number three Marin Cilic, as well as high-jump champion Blanka Vlasic, have

also become stars at home and abroad. And although Croatia has practically no ski resorts, it boasts Alpine ski champions — sister and brother Janica and Ivica Kostelic. Originating from Dalmatia, a region on the Adriatic, the Dalmatian dog breed was first depicted in paintings and church chronicles dating from the 16th and 18th centuries. Of Croatia's seven native dog breeds, Dalmatians became the most universally known thanks to Walt Disney's animated film "101 Dalmatians", first released in 1961. "At all events, people who deny the influence of Europe's 'smaller nations' should remember that the Croats have the rest of us by the throat," wrote Norman Davies in his book "Europe - A History". The British historian was referring

to the tie or cravat — worn every day by millions of men worldwide — whose Croatian origin reaches far into the past and is linked to love and devotion. According to Croatian tradition, women tied kerchiefs around their darlings' necks as they set off for battle in foreign wars. Notably, Croat mercenaries wore them as they fought on the side of King Louis XIV during the Thirty Years War in the 17th century. The humble tie was soon accepted as a fashion accessory by the powerful French court, and later spread to Britain and throughout the world. Its association with the Croat nation resulted in the word cravat. Today, Croatians celebrate Cravat Day on October 18. Experts warn that the nation of 3.8 million people is facing a demographic

crisis as it struggles with low birth rates, a steady exodus of residents abroad and an ageing population. Since Croatia joined the European Union in 2013, around 400,000 people have left the country. The lure of higher wages abroad along with frustration with widespread corruption and nepotism at home are cited as the main reasons for departure. The exodus has also fuelled a chronic labour shortage, notably in the construction and tourism sectors. In recent years it led to a sharp increase in workers from Asian countries posing a new challenge for one of Europe's more homogeneous societies. The United Nations projects that Croatia will have just 2.5 million people by the end of the century.—Agencies

Briefs

JI announces Gaza march on Dec 29

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) announced the Gaza million march in the federal capital on December 29 to express solidarity with Palestinians who are facing oppression by Israel. JI has been granted permission to hold the million march at Jinnah Avenue in New Blue Area following the negotiations with the district administration. Two rounds of talks were held between JI and district administrations as JI wanted to conduct the million march in the city's centre while the administration had been pressing to hold the show at Sangiani, Tirnol. The development came as today a Palestinian TV channel said five of its journalists were martyred Thursday in an Israeli strike on their vehicle in Gaza. A missile hit the journalists' broadcast truck as it was parked in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, according to a statement from their employer, Al-Quds Today. The channel identified the five staffers as Faisal Abu Al-Qumsan, Ayman Al-Jadi, Ibrahim Al-Sheikh Khalil, Fadi Hassouna and Mohammed Al-Lada'a.

Morocco migrant boat left 70 missing

BAMAKO: The sinking of a vessel carrying migrants in Moroccan waters on December 19 left 70 people missing, including 25 from Mali, that country's government said on Thursday. Around 80 migrants were on board the vessel heading for Spain and 11 survivors were rescued, with "25 young Malians unfortunately identified among the victims", the government said in a statement. Nine of those rescued were Malians, it said in the statement, which cited embassies in the region, officials, victims' families and survivors. Thousands of migrants have attempted perilous sea crossings from African shores trying to reach Europe, often in flimsy makeshift vessels. More than 10,400 migrants have died trying to reach Spain since 2024, including a record number heading for the Canary Islands, the Spanish migration NGO Caminador Fronteras said in a report on Thursday. - Agencies

No comment on Azerbaijani plane crash: Kremlin

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said Friday that it would not comment on the deadly crash of an Azerbaijani passenger plane until an inquiry was completed, after reports the jet was targeted by a Russian air defence missile. The Azerbaijan Airlines jet crashed near the Kazakh city of Aktau, an oil and gas hub, on Wednesday after going off course for undetermined reasons. Thirty-eight of the 67 people on board died. "An investigation is underway, and until the conclusions of the investigation, we do not consider we have the right to make any comments and we will not do so," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. - Agencies

MWM's sit-ins trigger traffic chaos in Karachi

Karachi traffic police announces diversion routes amid sit-ins against Parachinar situation in several areas

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Commuters have faced extreme difficulties due to the closure of arterial roads in Karachi due to sit-ins staged by the Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) against the tense situation in Parachinar city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram district. The protest sit-ins, which spread to several areas of the city a day earlier, continued on Friday, blocking key arteries and leaving commuters scrambling during the morning rush. Additional contingents of traffic and district police have been deployed to facilitate citizens followed by the release of traffic diversion plans due to the closure of at least six main roads across the metropolis. The closed roads included M A Jinnah Road, Numaish Chowringi, Abul Hasan Isphahani Road to Super Highway-Abbas Town, Five Star Chowringi, University Road, Safari Park, Shahrea Faisal, Star Gate to Malir 15. According to the traffic plan, traffic was being diverted to PP Chowringi, Gurumandir to Soldier Bazaar due to closure of M A Jinnah-Numaish Chowringi. An alternative route was provided for the traffic from Society Signal to Corridor-III, Britto Rd to Soldier Bazaar and Gurumandir. Similarly, both tracks of roads were closed for traffic from Abul Hasan Isphahani Road to Super Highway-Abbas Town, while the traffic was being diverted to Paradise Bakery to Fariya Chowk. Traffic flow was

Peace in Kurram is our top priority: KP CM Gandapur

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said on Friday that the protection of citizens' lives and property, as well as the establishment of peace and order in Kurram, is the provincial government's top priority. A spokesman for the Chief Minister's House of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has said that, following special instructions from Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, the provincial government's helicopter service was ongoing. He stated that the helicopter service would continue until the land route to Kurram is opened, adding that six flights were conducted to Kurram using the MI-17 helicopter on December 26 (Thursday). He further informed that, so far, a total of 613 people have been provided air transport services through the helicopter service, including members of the jirga, as well as ordinary citizens such as children, women, students, and patients. CM Gandapur stated that the provincial government was fully aware of the difficulties faced by the citizens of Kurram in the current situation. He expressed hope that the problems of Kurram's people would be resolved as soon as possible and that normalcy would return to the region. Gandapur also emphasized that efforts were being made for a peaceful and acceptable solution to the issue, urging the parties involved and local leaders to support the provincial government's efforts for the sake of peace. He reiterated that the protection of citizens' lives and property, as well as the establishment of peace and order, was the primary priority and responsibility.

resumed from service roads for Nazimabad residents due to complete closure of Five Star Chowringi. The protesters also blocked University Road by staging a sit-in before Metro Shopping Mall near Safari Park towards Samama Shopping Centre, leading to traffic diversion from nearby streets and service roads. Meanwhile, commuters were being asked to travel from Drigh Road to Rashid Minhas Road due to closure of Shrea Faisal from Star Gate to Malir 15 while traffic from Millennium Shopping Mall was being diverted to other areas via Drigh Road. Another

arterial road - National Highway Malir to Quidabad Road, was blocked due to a sit-in, therefore, the traffic was being diverted to Model Colony via Malir Halt. The traffic police also updated the citizens about an alternative route from Manzil Pump to Younus Chowringi and Daud Chowringi to Industrial Area. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has appealed to the protesters not cause troubles for the citizens as "blocking roads in Karachi and Sukkur are not a solution to the Parachinar issue". Talking to media in Sukkur today, CM Murad clarified that the government was not against peaceful protests, adding that it was the government's responsibility to prevent its citizens from facing difficulties. The religio-political party is protesting against the deteriorated law and order situation in Parachinar as clashes claimed more than 130 lives, with reports emerging of over 100 children dying due to a shortage of medicines in the city. However, KP government spokesperson Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif has refuted these reports of child fatalities in the district. Kurram, a tribal district of around 600,000 near the border with Afghanistan, has been a flashpoint for tensions for decades. Fresh clashes erupted last month, triggering a humanitarian crisis with reports of starvation, lack of medicine and oxygen shortages following the blocking of the main highway connecting Kurram's main city of Parachinar to Peshawar.

Re-arrest of Moonis ordered

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: A special central court on Friday directed the authorities to take steps for the re-arrest of former federal minister and PTI leader Chaudhary Moonis Elahi in a money laundering case. Judge Tanveer Ahmad Sheikh issued an order during the previous hearing, directing the arrest of Moonis Elahi and co-accused Muhammad Jibrani from abroad. The court instructed that a report on the arrest efforts be presented at the next hearing. It was noted that the JIT head was absent due to performing Umrah. Meanwhile, former Punjab chief minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi's acquittal plea was submitted, and the court sought responses from all parties. Further proceedings were scheduled for January 20.

PIA adds another ATR aircraft

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has added another long-grounded ATR aircraft to its operational fleet. According to the CEO of PIA, the inclusion of this aircraft will strengthen PIA's flights to destinations such as Gilgit, Sukkur, Turbat, and Gwadar. The national carrier has outlined a plan to increase its operational fleet. According to the spokesperson, PIA will expand its fleet following the removal of restrictions imposed by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency. As part of its expansion plan, PIA is also working to extend its network to Europe and the UK. In the first phase of the plan, the number of operational Boeing 777 aircraft will increase to eight. The spokesperson also mentioned that the number of Airbus A320 aircraft is expected to reach 12, while the ATR fleet will be expanded to two. This fleet upgrade is in line with PIA's aggressive operating plan for 2025. PIA is making every effort to expand its network and provide low-cost travel options for overseas Pakistanis through new international routes. The airline's on-time performance rate has exceeded 90 percent, one of the highest in the country. On December 19, PIA announced that it is accelerating its efforts to make two grounded aircraft operational ahead of Europe flights.

PM orders uninterrupted gas supply

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday taking notice of complaints by the domestic consumers regarding shortage of gas supply, directed to ensure provision of uninterrupted supply to the consumers during winter season. Chairing a meeting held here to review the situation of gas supply across the country, the prime minister directed to permanently resolve the issue by bringing reforms in the system structure. "Providing gas to domestic consumers is the government's top priority", the prime minister said. During the briefing, it was informed that there was a surplus of R LNG (Regasified Liquefied Natural Gas) in the system, leading to improvements in gas load management compared to last year. The meeting was told that the duration of gas load shedding this year was shorter than last year. Gas is being provided to domestic consumers from 5 AM to 10 PM, while gas is also being provided to the power sector according to its demand, the meeting was further informed. Similarly, it was told that online dashboards for consumer complaints by SNGPL and SSGC were operational and the complaint resolution rate for SNGPL was 93%, while SSGC's rate was 79%.

Iranian envoy, PCP chairman join hands to combat fake news

Ambassador Moghadam emphasized the need for cultural exchange through the sharing of dramas and movies between the two countries



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan, Reza Amir Moghadam and Press Council of Pakistan (PCP) Chairman, Arshad Khan Jadoon on Friday reaffirmed

their commitment to enhancing media collaboration between Iran and Pakistan as part of a broader strategy to counter the growing menace of fake news. During the meeting here at the Iranian Embassy, both dignitaries underscored the critical importance of tackling disinformation that threatens so-

cial harmony. They agreed that fostering strong media ties between the two nations is essential to portraying a positive image of both countries on the global stage. Ambassador Moghadam emphasized the need for cultural exchange through the sharing of dramas and movies between the two countries. "We must use media as a bridge to promote cultural cohesion and mutual understanding among our peoples," he stated. He also assured full support from the Iranian side to further strengthen bilateral media cooperation. Chairman Jadoon provided an overview of the PCP's constitutional mandate, highlighting its role in addressing fake news and promoting ethical journalism. He outlined PCP's efforts in monitoring media practices and ensuring adherence to the code of ethics to maintain journalistic integrity. Chairman Jadoon emphasized that the agenda of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to combat fake news is a critical issue facing the entire world. He highlighted the importance of strengthening bilateral ties to address misinformation and to collaboratively work towards the development of journalists in both countries.

DG immigration claims passport backlog cleared

Since July 1, a record total of 3,376,510 passports have been printed

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The backlog of pending passports across Pakistan has been successfully cleared, according to Mustafa Jamal Qazi, the Director General of Immigration and Passports. During a surprise visit to the passport production unit, the DG reviewed the printing and issuance process and provided an update on the progress. Since July 1, a record total of 3,376,510 passports have been printed, including 776,451 in the normal category, 1,896,403 in the urgent category, and 703,656 in the fast-track category, he noted. DG passport credited the hard work and dedication of the production team, which worked continuously to meet the

high demand and achieve this significant milestone. With the backlog now cleared, citizens are advised to directly collect their passports from regional passport offices without waiting for notifications through message or email, as the delivery process has been completed, said DG. Qazi also emphasised that the timely issuance of passports will continue, aiming to provide convenience to applicants moving forward. Earlier, Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi has claimed that the long-standing backlog of passports has been completely cleared. Naqvi on Thursday inaugurated the newly built state-of-the-art Passport and Immigration Headquarters and the Islamabad Regional Passport Office with an aim to provide better services to citizens, with the Islamabad Regional Passport Office now operating 24/7. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Mohsin Naqvi announced a series of reforms and improvements in passport services nationwide.

'End of humanity' Israel empties last hospital in north Gaza

Israeli forces raid Kamal Adwan Hospital after killing 53 in airstrikes

NEWS DESK

GAZA CITY: Israeli forces have raided Kamal Adwan hospital in northern Gaza on Friday morning, hours after airstrikes on a nearby building killed 53 people, including medical staff. The military had earlier forced dozens of sick and injured patient to leave Kamal Adwan Hospital. According to reports, nearly 75 patients are in the courtyard of the facility, which has been under sustained attack for weeks. Early Friday morning, Israeli forces intensified their operations around Kamal Adwan Hospital as tanks, supported by quadcopter machine guns, advanced deeper into the area. Footage captures the moment an Israeli drone dropped grenades on Palestinian homes near Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza, earlier today. Explosive devices, previously planted near the hospital, were detonated at the northern gate and the back entrance, causing significant damage and igniting fires in several nearby buildings, according to the report. At approximately 7:15 a.m. (05:15 GMT), Israeli officers used loudspeakers to instruct the hospital director, along with the injured and patients, to evacuate the premises within 15 minutes.

Yemeni missile hits Tel Aviv airport

SANAA: Air raid sirens have sounded over a large part of the Israeli occupied territories following a missile attack from Yemen which targeted Tel Aviv early Friday and caused Ben Gurion airport to shut down. Israel's emergency services reported that 18 settlers were injured in Tel Aviv while attempting to reach the safety of shelters. Videos shared online showed Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system failing, as it attempted to intercept the incoming projectile. The missile strike reportedly forced half of the occupied territories into lockdown, with Israeli outlets describing the incident as a failure of the regime's defensive measures. In a statement, the Yemeni armed forces said they "carried out a specific military operation targeting Ben Gurion Airport in the occupied area of Yaffa [Tel Aviv] using a hypersonic ballistic missile of Palestine2 type". "The missile succeeded in reaching its target despite the enemy's censorship, and the operation resulted in casualties and the cessation of navigation at the airport," it said. Yemeni forces also carried out an operation targeting "a vital target of the Israeli enemy in the occupied area of Yaffa with a drone, and the operation achieved its goal successfully" it added. - Agencies

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