

100-day Human Empowerment Memorandum signed in Muzaffarabad

Abdul Majeed Tahir

MUZAFFARABAD: A meeting was held between the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Pakistan for Human Rights and Women Empowerment Mashal Malik and the Minister of Women Development Syed Bazil Ali Naqvi at the Muzaffarabad.

In the meeting, a memorandum of women's rights was signed in the context of the federal government's plan for 100 days of human empowerment and human rights for the women of Azad Kashmir. Meeting was held regarding the signing of the 100-day Human Empowerment and Human Rights Memorandum.

Government Minister Ms Taqdis Gilani Member of AJK Assembly Nisara Abbasi, Secretary Women Development Department Irshad Qureshi, Director Women Development Department Qudsia Batul,

Director Women Development Department Dr.

Ikram ul Haq, Deputy Director Nusrat Shaheen and other officers and social personalities attended.

On this occasion, Addressing the meeting, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan Human Rights and Women's Empowerment Mashal Malik said that the development of women is a special focus of the federal government. To empower women, they have to be economically strengthened. Digitization has to be promoted.

If we address health and other problems in Azad Kashmir like other provinces, we will be able to move towards real development.

He said that he is happy that the literacy rate of Azad Kashmir is more better than other provinces.

Our focus is to teach digitalization trends to women in collaboration with the Women Development Department of Azad Kash-

mir so that they can get the best employment opportunities.

Addressing other women's health issues, including mortality, is critical.

He said that the quota of women of Azad Kashmir will be increased with regard to employment in the federation. The situation in Occupied Kashmir is worse. We will work together with the Government of Azad Kashmir for the betterment and exemplary development of Azad Kashmir.

Speaking on the occasion, Government Minister Syed Bazil Ali Naqvi said that the women of the rural areas of Azad Kashmir are suffering from problems like health and employment.

The help of the federal government is needed to focus on the rural areas.

He expressed his determination that the present government under the leadership of Prime Minister Azad Kashmir Chaudhry Anwarul Haque will

take all possible steps for the development of women in collaboration with the Federation.

Women Development Minister Syed Bazil Naqvi thanked Mashal Malik for his visit to Azad Kashmir and said that the help of the federal government is needed for the development of women in Azad Kashmir.

He praised the 100-day plan of the federal government and said that this plan of the federal government is a revolutionary step for the welfare of women, which is less appreciated.

While talking to the meeting, the Minister of Government Mrs. Taqdees Gilani welcomed the plan of the federal government regarding human empowerment and human rights for the development of women for 100 days and defined the development of women as economic development and said that If we want to create a better society, we have to focus on the development of women.



Daily wages

KARACHI: A younger boy is selling flowers bracelets along the Shaheed-e-Millat Road to earn daily wages for the livelihood of his family, in such hard days of the Life.



Photo: Online

Azad Kashmir government says it will keep up pressure on India over Kashmir

Abdul Majeed Tahir

MUZAFFARABAD: Azad Kashmir Government Spokesman and Finance Minister Abdul Majid Khan has said that the priority of the current coalition government under the leadership of Chaudhry Anwar Haq is public service, the focus of the government is the development of Azad Kashmir. Chaudhry Anwarul Haq's revolutionary measures like austerity and saving policies for good governance will change the destiny of the region. The people and

government of Azad Kashmir stand with the oppressed people of Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. On January 5, citizens should highlight the war crimes committed by the Indian Army in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir across the world. The only solution to the Kashmir issue lies in the resolutions passed by the Security Council, the Azad Kashmir government will highlight the Kashmir issue at the international level with a systematic policy. Azad Kashmir Government Spokesman and Finance Minister Abdul Majid Khan



has said in a statement that the Azad Kashmir government is taking great steps for the welfare of the people. He took vigorous, timely and lively measures regarding accountability, which have

no precedent in the past. The spokesperson of the Azad Kashmir government has said that India's state, diplomatic and legal terrorism is not acceptable. Citizens should raise their voices for the oppressed Kashmiris on January 5. The representative coalition government of Azad Kashmir should highlight the issue of Kashmir at the international level will He said that highlighting Occupied Jammu and Kashmir at the international level is one of the prime objectives of the current coalition government.

Orange cultivation declining in Sargodha

M. Mahad Ali Lali

The best-known kinu (orange) in the world is from Sargodha, unfortunately, its quality and quantity are decreasing season by season.

The main reason behind it is the expansion of towns on agricultural land, the absence of research initiatives, pests and new diseases.

Due to the expansion of towns on agricultural land; the agricultural land is decreasing which makes the low quantity of kinu production in Sargodha. For decades there has been no research on how to increase the quality of kinus and on how to deal with the new pests and diseases. The absence of research-driven alternatives has led farmers to continue traditional pesticide practices, showcasing the reliance on historical methods of kinu (orange) production in Sargodha.

81 lakh 71 thousand cotton bails arrived in cotton factories

Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: according to Secretary Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association Lt- Col Mustafa Ali Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) has released the data of the arrival of cotton factories, according to which 81 lakh 71 thousand 82 bales of cotton came in the ginning factories of the country till December 31, 2023. Till December 31, 2022, 46 lakh 12 thousand 687 bales have arrived in the cotton factories. Compared to the same period of last year, 35 lakh 58 thousand 395 bales have arrived in the cotton factories more. The rate of increase was 77.14%. 40 lakh 78 thousand 769 bales of cotton have arrived in the factories of Punjab province, which is 13 lakh 16 thousand 482 bales more

than the crop of 27 lakh 62 thousand 287 bales of cotton coming in the factories in the same period of last year. The rate of increase in Punjab was 47.66 percent. 40 lakh 92 thousand 313 bales of cotton came to the factories in the Sindh province, which is 22 lakh 41 thousand 913 bales more than the 18 lakh 50 thousand 400 bales of cotton coming to the factories in the same period last year.

The rate of increase in the province of Sindh was 121.16 percent. Coming to factories by 31st December 2023 80 lakh 82 thousand 744 bales of cotton were produced from cotton. 241 ginning factories are operational in the country. Exporters/traders have purchased 292 thousand 126 bales of cotton this season while the textile sector has purchased 73 lakh

14 thousand 127 bales of cotton. The Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) has not purchased cotton for the 2023-24 season. 210 ginning factories are operational in Punjab province and 40 lakh 8 thousand 64 bales of cotton are produced. 65 thousand 311 bales of cotton in Multan district, 94 thousand 8 bales of cotton in Lodhran district, 2 lakh 17 thousand 7 bales of cotton in Khanewal district, 80 thousand 516 bales of cotton in Muzaffargarh district, 3 lakh 53 thousand 945 bales of cotton in Dera Ghazi Khan district, 31 thousand 825 bales of cotton in Rajanpur district, 2 lakh 22 thousand 968 bales of cotton in Leh, district In the alley 2 lakh 15 thousand 519 bales of cotton, 1 lakh 89 thousand 716 bales of cotton in Sahiwal district, 5 lakh 98 thousand 211 bales of cotton in Rahimyar Khan

district, 5 lakh 51 thousand 377 bales of cotton in Bahawalpur district, 10 lakh 67 thousand 804 bales of cotton in Bahawalnagar district. 16 lakh 88 thousand 766 bales of cotton in Sanghar district, 1 lakh 35 thousand 900 bales of cotton in Mirpur Khas district, 1 lakh 78 thousand 615 bales of cotton in Navab Shah district, 3 lakh 20 thousand 976 bales of cotton in Nav Shahr Feroze district, 3 lakh 54 thousand 178 bales of cotton in Khairpur district, 5 lakh 46 thousand 8 bales of cotton in Sukkur district. 90 Bales Cotton, Dist 63 thousand 200 bales in jam shoro Cotton and 2 lakh 28 thousand 882 bales of cotton in Hyderabad district and 1 lakh 87 thousand 221 bales of cotton in Balochistan province. There is unsold stock of 564 thousand 829 bales of cotton and cotton.

Multan Chamber of Commerce & Industry urges for PIA fair cargo rates



Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: Multan Chamber of Commerce & Industry (MCCI) expresses its support for the exporters of fresh fruit, vegetables and meat in the Multan region. The Chamber acknowledges the challenges faced by exporters, particularly concerning higher cargo rates of PIA in comparison to other stations like Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad. In light of these concerns, MCCI urges Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to reassess and rationalize cargo rates for fresh produce in Multan. This adjustment is crucial to ensure equitable opportunities for our local exporters and enhance the competitiveness of our agricultural products in the global market. Furthermore, MCCI calls upon PIA to extend special discounted cargo rates for the exporters of fresh fruit, vegetables and meat from Multan to key destinations, including Sharjah, Dubai, Riyadh, Muscat, and Jeddah. These measures will not only benefit the exporters but also contribute to the overall growth of the agricultural sector in the region.

In a statement Mian Rashid Iqbal, President MCCI appreciates the role of PIA in connecting Multan to international markets. We believe that collaborative efforts of both the entities can create a more conducive environment for the exporters of Fresh fruit, vegetables and meat he said.

Commissioner Multan Division visits the under-construction site of Nishtar Hospital 2



Kiran Asim

MULTAN: Commissioner Multan Division Engineer Aamir Khattak visited the under-construction site of Nishtar 2 Hospital and directed to ensure the completion of the project within the stipulated period. He said that Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi has a special focus on the completion of health projects. The construction of Nishtar 2 Hospital with a huge sum of 10 billion rupees is in progress. The Punjab government is trying to provide easy access to modern health facilities to the people. The construction of Nishtar 2 Hospital will provide the best treatment facilities to South Punjab. While giving a briefing on the occasion, Director Development Rubina Kausar said that Pathology, CSSD, laundry, kitchen, mortuary, general store, place of worship, waste management room on the basement have been completed and handed over to the administration. On the grave floor, OPD, radiology, emergency, trauma, Diagnostics, trauma, complete wards have been entrusted to each administration. Maternal and child, orthopedic wards are complete on the first floor. have been handed over to the administration.

Bid to smuggle narcotics worth millions of rupees foiled

Raza Naqvi

ATTOCK: The National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) on Wednesday foiled a bid to smuggle a huge quantity of narcotics worth millions of the rupees on the Islamabad- Peshawar Motorway (M-1) near Hassanabdal.

According to an NHMP spokesperson, the officers signaled a suspicious vehicle coming from Peshawar to stop, but the driver fled the scene. The NHMP officers chased the suspicious vehicle and near Hazara Interchange, the driver escaped the scene while leaving the vehicle behind on the road. During a search 12 packets of heroin weighing to around 12 kilogram was recovered from the suspected vehicle. The search for the escaped driver continued, the spokesman added. The sector commander of NHMP Shafique ur Rehman was also present at the spot along with the force during the operation. "The recovered drugs were handed over to ANF Attock after the completion of the legal procedure", the spokesman said.

Islamabad
15° - 23° Clear

SERVICES
Namaz Timings
Fajr 5:44 am
Zohr 12:12 pm
Asr 3:33 pm
Maghrib 5:11 pm
Isha 6:40 pm

EMERGENCY
Rescue (Police) 15
Bomb Disposal 15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/
Islamabad 1122 & 16
& Rescue Services 4451122
Motorway Police 9266044
Motorway Police 9270601-20

Women Police Stations
Islamabad 9222596
Rawalpindi 9270601-20

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

HOSPITALS
CMH 561111
MH 561116
Cantt Hospital 9270907-11
DHQ 5556311-4
RGH 9290301-7
Holy Family 9290322-7
PIMS 9261170-79
Polyclinic 9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666

Pakistani Senators call for OIC tribunal to try Israel for war crimes



ABC

ISLAMABAD: A powerful assembly of distinguished voices convened at Riphah International University in Islamabad under the banner of the 'Save Gaza Campaign'. The roundtable witnessed the participation of esteemed figures including Khalid Quddumi, Representative of Hamas in Pakistan, Senators Mushahid Hussain Syed, Mushtaq Ahmad Khan, Danesh Kumar, Gurdeep Singh, Palwasha Khan, human rights activist Amina Masood Janjua, along with notable personalities such as Hamid Mir, Dr. Rashid Aftab, Ajmal Baloch, Rizwan Shabbir Kayani, Dr. Nigar, Javeria Arshad, and Qaiser Ahmad Raja.

The speakers, unified in their stance, issued a resounding call for an immediate ceasefire and an unequivocal cessation of the ongoing genocide perpetrated against the Palestinian people by Israel. Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed emphasized the urgency for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to establish a tribunal to investigate and hold Israel accountable for its egregious war crimes, condemning the atrocities targeting innocent children and women. The forum further called for OIC to convene its forthcoming meeting in Al Qudus, demonstrating a collective resolve to address the pressing issues facing Palestine.

Commissioner directs PIEDMC to complete survey of Economic Zone site on Rwp Ring Road

City Desk
RAWALPINDI: Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chatta here on Wednesday directed the Punjab Industrial Estate Development and Management Company (PIEDMC) authorities to complete the survey of the 5000 acres Economic Zone site on the Rawalpindi Ring Road and submit a report next week.



presentation on the proposed site at Rawalpindi Ring Road Economic Zones and the facilities to be provided to the businessmen.

Director General (DG) Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) Saif Anwar Jappa, Director Development Nazia Sudhan, President, Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, (RCCI) Saqib Rafiq, Senior Vice President, Muhammad Hamza Saroosh, Former President, RCCI, Chaudhry Nadeem A Rauf and other officers concerned were present on the occasion. The task of site survey for creating economic zone on 5000 acres land along

the Rawalpindi Ring Road had been given to PIDMC Company Lahore, the Commissioner informed.

Liaquat Ali Chatta instructed the officers concerned to arrange a visit of the PIDMC delegation immediately after the meeting at the site and provide them with all the necessary information and support.

Establishment of wholesale market and industrial zones in the proposed Economic Zones on the Ring Road would prove to be a game changer for the residents of

Rawalpindi, Liaquat Ali Chatta added.

The site plan prepared for Rawalpindi would help promote business activities in the region, he said adding, economic zone would create new employment opportunities for the people.

In the economic and industrial zone, cottage industry, shoe market, plastic, transport, goods forwarding, heavy machinery, marble, steel, jams and jewelry, grain market, furniture, education, mining and other zones would be created, the commissioner informed.

Media talks

ISLAMABAD: General Secretary (Tehreek Nafaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafariya) Allama Basharat Hussain Imami talking to media persons outside Election Commission in Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Raja Farid

HABIBMETRO and ACE Money Transfer Join Hands to Facilitate Overseas Pakistanis

PPA

KARACHI: HABIBMETRO signed a partnership agreement with ACE Money Transfer on Wednesday, December 27, 2023, to facilitate safe and legal remittance services for overseas Pakistanis, especially in the UK, Europe, Canada, and Australia. The partnership aims to contribute to the country's economy by offering reliable and convenient means for sending remittances to Pakistanis residing abroad.

On behalf of HABIBMETRO, Mr. Khuram Shahzad Khan—President & CEO, Mr. Syed Ather Ahmed—Head Commercial (South) & FI, Mr. Syed Intikhab Hussain Rizvi—Country Treasurer, Mr. Muhammad Raza Dyer—Head Operations, Mr. Mohammad Mujtaba Askari—Head Global Remittances, Mr. Syed Wajeeh ul Husnain—Unit Head Global Remittances and Mr. Tauseef Rafique—Unit Head Global Remittances attended the signing ceremony.

Mr. Aftab Ashraf Gondal—Chairman ACE Group of Companies, and Senior



Management of ACE Money Transfer represented the company at the agreement signing ceremony.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Khuram Shahzad Khan, President & CEO of HABIBMETRO said, "At HABIBMETRO, we are passionate about delivering secure and efficient financial services that cater to the financial needs of our customers. HABIBMETRO's partnership with ACE Money Transfer is in alignment with our commitment to providing overseas customers with a more streamlined and regulatory-compliant remittance process."

Sharing his insights about the joint venture, Aftab Ashraf Gondal expressed, "Facing pressing economic woes, Pakistan must curb black market remittances and promote regulated channels.

ACE Money Transfer (registered name "Aftab Currency Exchange Limited"), based out of the United Kingdom, with Global offices in Europe, Australia, and Canada, is a Fintech providing remittance services. It offers impeccable online money transfer services to millions of expatriates with an extensive network of 375,000+ locations spread across 100+ countries worldwide.

Zong 4G's Digital Transformation Gets Major Boost with CMMI Maturity Level 3 Appraisal

PNP

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's leading telecom operator Zong 4G celebrates the attainment of Maturity Level 3 (ML3) of the prestigious Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) by ISACA.



CMMI is a well-recognized framework for enhancing software development practices. The CMMI Maturity Level Appraisal represents a validated collection of best global practices that urge organizations to establish and measure essential capabilities, addressing prevalent business challenges. It aims at empowering organizations to consistently deliver high-quality products.

Appreciating this accomplishment, the official Spokesperson for Zong 4G stated, "this recent achievement is an outcome of the exceptional hard work and dedication exhibited by Zong 4G's team to ensure the enhancement of digital technology in Pakistan. We are confident in our capability to provide world-class software services and solutions always, and the acquirement of CMMI Maturity Level 3 appraisal further demonstrates the organization's future objectives. This appraisal will open doors to many new and exceptional opportunities for Zong 4G and we are looking forward to that."

Fire engulfs Aabpara Market in Islamabad due to short circuit

ABC

ISLAMABAD: according to the rescue spokesman early morning on Wednesday massive fire broke out at Aabpara Market in Islamabad and overtake several garment shops due to Short circuit. Fire brigade officials said that they were informed by Police after receiving information by the area's residents as they seen smoke rising from Aabpara Market where fire spread quickly. The blaze started in clothing shops in the market, which spread to other shops later. In which fire completely burnt three shops while materials in the adjacent shop were damaged badly. The fire brigade was informed about the blaze around 9 O'clock and fire tenders were actively take part in the operation to extinguish the fire. No casualties were reported as the firefighters faced difficulties in their operation due to thick smoke blanket the market and the narrow streets leading to it. The shopkeepers were busy in saving their goods from their shops on their own to reduce the estimation of damage and wastage of investment.



Made-in-Pakistan brands need an incentive policy to grow, FBATI President

PNP

KARACHI: The banking regulator should introduce a low-cost financing scheme under an incentivized policy to support the expansion of made-in-Pakistan brands for substituting the inflows of imported foreign products said President Federal B Area Association of Trade and Industry (FBATI) Syed Raza Hussain.



President FBATI pointed out that various local brands have reached their maximum production capacity in recent weeks, with a shortage being reported of many items in the local retail markets, such as beverages, soap, dairy products, snacks, confectionaries, detergent, cosmetics, biscuits, and various edible and wearable products, etc.

Tickets to be finalized within two days, as consultation with Khan completed: PTI Chairman

Urges Supreme Court again to act instantly to ensure fair polls, foil bid to deprive PTI of 'bat'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan said that he completed the consultation process with the PTI Founding Chairman Imran Khan and the allotment of tickets would be finalized within two days.

During his information interaction with journalists here on Wednesday, PTI Chairman stated that he held meeting with PTI Founding Chairman pertaining to the allotment of party's tickets to get his final nod about the potential party's candidates for the much-needed general elections scheduled for February 8, 2024.

Barrister Gohar expressed his disappointment over the Peshawar High Court (PHC) verdict, restoring Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) order

which had stripped the party of its iconic electoral symbol 'bat' because it was not just the PTI's electoral symbol but was also the symbol of the expectations of millions of Pakistani people.

He said that Imran Khan sacrificed his party chairmanship for protecting the party's electoral symbol "bat" for the people of the country, for democracy and the prosperity and development of Pakistan.

PTI Chairman lamented that the electoral watchdog was chasing the case like it had never done so in the past, urging the Supreme Court (SC) to take the needful and immediately intervene to thwart the conspiracy to deprive the PTI of its electoral symbol to block the way of horse-trading to save democracy in

the country.

He reminded that the apex court had already settled that snatching the electoral symbol was tantamount to dissolving a political party and this right only lies with the apex court in Article 17 of the Constitution.

However, he stated: "If you take away our electoral symbol, will all of them contest as independent candidates? If this happens, who will be responsible for horse-trading after the polls?"

PTI Chairman asked that there a total of 227 reserved who played an important role in the election of the president and prime minister, which would be gone to the party contesting elections on electoral symbol, adding that the PTI could not be deprived of 227 reserved seats come

what may.

Barrister Gohar Khan made it clear that all the brutal and unlawful tactics were being used against PTI and its leaders and workers, which clearly indicated that these people were even scared of their under-19 team.

PTI Chairman pointed out that look at the situation how PTI was being treated for the last over a year, as the ECP was being used to corner PTI at all costs, which was no service to the country because giving government to a party having 20 or 25 percent public support against the party having support of over 70 percent of the nation would be a great injustice to the country and the nation.

He recalled that the PTI was conducted the most transparent intra-party elec-

tions but out of the total 175 registered political parties, the electoral body only targeted PTI, clearly depicting that all these unjust actions were taken to sideline and push against the wall the most popular political party of the country.

However, he stated that all these biased, illegal and constitutional measures were being taken to deny PTI its electoral symbol "bat", which put serious questions on the transparency and fairness of elections.

PTI Chairman went on to say that that the PHC's verdict was the clear reflection of the electoral watchdog's biasness and prejudice, announcing to that the party would move the top court against this decision.

Barrister Gohar Khan emphasized

that if you take away the "bat", the world will not recognise your election.

He expressed his optimism that the apex court would get them the "bat" back, demanding that the SC to instantly intervene before it was too late. However, he reiterated that the PTI would not boycott the election and they would contest the polls under any circumstances.

PTI Chairman said that the entire state machinery was brought to a standstill to oust the PTI of electoral race because they were well-aware of the fact that PTI would trounce its political opponents conveniently if free, fair and transparent polls were held on February 8, 2024.

Press Release by PTI Central Media Department

Group Chairman/Chief Editor: **Almas Ayoub Sabir**
 Vice Chairman: **Asim Nazir Ahmad**
 Managing Editor: **Naveed Ahmad Khan**
 Head Editorial Advisory Board: **Amjad Mehmood**
 Bureau Chief Karachi: **Saleem Zaman Khan.**
 (mszk786@gmail.com)
 Bureau Chief Lahore: **Syed Afraz Ali Nazish**
 (afrazalishah@gmail.com)
 Islamabad Office: Rose Plaza, I-8 Markaz.
 Karachi office: Flat No.C.3.A.One Comfort, Block No 11.
 Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Main Rashid Minhas Road.
 Lahore Office: 7-E,Samanberg, Johar Town.
 Email: spokesmanislamabad@gmail.com
 Whatsapp: 0346-5008408

SC's Response to Level Playing Concerns - I

Witnessing the live streaming of the Supreme Court's proceedings to ensure a level playing field for all political parties, notably PTI, was an exhilarating and rare opportunity for me and indeed a rewarding experience for the entire nation. The courtroom drama unfolded as a battle of wits, with arguments scoring points and constitutional provisions being quoted. The determined Chief Justice persistently opposed the contempt of court proceedings against the Election Commission, Chief Secretary, and IG Police of Punjab. This was based on the contention that the Election Commission had complied with the Supreme Court's directives by issuing letters to all provincial election commissioners and the government, emphasizing the need for a fair electoral landscape.

Amidst this intense debate, Mr. Sardar Latif Khosa emerged as a persistent voice, asserting that the Election Commission's responsibility extended beyond mere letters; it was also tasked with ensuring the actual implementation of the Supreme Court's directives in both letter and spirit. He argued that the Punjab provincial administration's disregard for these instructions amounted to a violation of the court's order, constituting contempt.

Just as Mr. Khosa's argument seemed to be faltering, an unexpected turn occurred. He drew attention to a paragraph in the Election Commission's report, revealing widespread allegations of abductions, constraints on PTI

candidates and their supporters, and incidents where the RO office was inaccessible due to police cordoning, preventing PTI candidates from filing nomination papers. This revelation inadvertently bolstered Mr. Khosa's case, providing the Chief Justice with convincing evidence to admit the petition and issue notices to the Punjab advocate general, inspector general, and chief secretary. The Supreme Court sought explanations regarding the alleged lack of a level-playing field in the upcoming general elections.

This pivotal moment led the court to also direct a report from officials concerning the implementation of its order, specifically addressing the party's concerns. The proceedings were adjourned till January 8, signaling the gravity and importance of the case and its potential implications for ensuring fair and transparent elections.

It goes without saying that a fair and equitable political landscape in nascent democracies like Pakistan necessitates certain critical conditions. This includes equal access to resources, transparent electoral processes, freedom of expression, impartial institutions, and fair media coverage. These conditions foster a democratic environment where all political entities have an equal chance to present their policies, ensuring a level playing field. Such fairness isn't just a democratic ideal but a necessity for the country's stability and legitimacy. It encourages

trust among citizens in the democratic system, promoting active participation and ensuring that the voices of all segments of society are heard and valued.

The responsibility for creating and maintaining a level playing field is shared among various stakeholders. Government institutions such as the election commission, judiciary, and law enforcement agencies play a pivotal role in ensuring fair elections and opportunities for all parties. Political entities themselves bear the responsibility of upholding democratic principles and advocating for equitable competition. Civil society groups, along with the media, serve as watchdogs, monitoring and highlighting any biases or discrepancies in the electoral process.

The absence of a level playing field during elections reverberates across multiple fronts, amplifying negative repercussions. Political parties suffer from eroded trust and diminished legitimacy, directly impacting their ability to govern effectively and gain public confidence. Societal repercussions include unrest and disenfranchisement, eroding social cohesion. Countrywide, political instability disrupts policymaking and governance, affecting economic stability and deterring both foreign and domestic investment. Businesses grapple with uncertainty, impacting long-term planning and market stability. Internationally, a compromised electoral environment tarnishes a country's reputation, weak-

ening diplomatic relations and eroding confidence in its commitment to democratic principles. Collectively, these consequences compromise long-term growth, stability, and global standing.

The systematic targeting and imprisonment of a major political party's leadership severely disrupt the foundational principles of fair competition in elections. Such actions not only impede the functioning of the targeted party but also undermine the democratic ethos of the nation. Similarly, when another political faction faces harassment and violent obstructions to their activities, it exacerbates the lack of fairness and safety in the electoral arena. These instances paint a troubling picture of an imbalanced and unjust political landscape, challenging the very essence of a level playing field in democratic processes.

The pathways for redress and seeking justice amidst such allegations and injustices are entrenched within established institutional mechanisms. The Election Commission stands as a pivotal entity responsible for overseeing fair elections; thus, parties encountering discrimination or hindrances in the electoral process can formally report grievances to this body. Additionally, judicial avenues serve as vital forums for challenging unjust detentions, harassment, or violations of political rights, providing a means for legal recourse. Human rights commissions, both domestic and international, offer platforms to investigate and address such violations, safeguarding democratic principles.

To be continued



Analysis

Qamar Bashir

Pakistani traders ride county's booming economy

More Pakistani traders are settling in the Tashikurgan Tajik autonomous county of Kashgar, China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, to tap the strong business potential. As the county is close to their homes, they said it's easy to commute and fit into the local community. Booming tourism also brings more tourists, which benefits their businesses.

Murad Shah, a Pakistani jeweler, said his gemstone store in the county has welcomed about 100 to 200 tourists a day after it resumed operations in April.

He said his business is starting to recover after China optimized its COVID-19 policies. "There are a lot of tourists. The county has a diverse culture and landscape, and so many good attractions to see," he said, adding he is hopeful about the future, China Daily reported. One good reason for him to open a store in the county is that his hometown, a small village in Pakistan, is just 200 kilometers away, which can be reached in only three hours by car. Another reason is that China is developing very fast with a sound economy, he said. "Many Pakistanis prefer to do business here because there is money here," Shah said. At the store of Pakistani merchant Nazar Karim Ali, visitors come to buy gemstones, jewelry, blankets, cotton bed sheets, clothes and handicrafts, all made in Pakistan. Karim is the second generation of business owners in his family. His father and uncle exported silk from China between 1989 and 1992. He said over the last 32 years, the county has made him feel at home, and he shares the same culture with local people. Many initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor have made it very easy to do business, Karim said. There are good opportunities for Chinese people to invest in Pakistan, which also benefits Pakistanis, he said. Located on the Pamir Plateau, the county, with an area of 25,000 square kilometers and a population of 41,000, is the only one in China that borders three countries — Pakistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. It has two land ports — the Khunjerab Pass is 125 km from Sust Port in Pakistan, and the Karasu Port is only 14 km from Kulma Pass in Tajikistan. Due to the ease of transportation, Tashikurgan Tajik trades with neighboring countries frequently, importing mainly minerals, agricultural products, and seafood while exporting textiles and clothing, mechanical and electrical products, and household goods, according to local authorities. The number of tourist visits reached more than 1.34 million from January to late December, up 86 percent year-on-year, with May to October the peak season. Tourists are lured by the county's many unique attractions such as the 7,546-meter Mount Muztagata and Mount Qogir, or K2, the world's second-highest peak at 8,611 meters, and a 2,000-year-old ancient stone city.



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

Ecotourism: An eco-friendly approach to tourism in Pakistan

Ayesha Eman

Iwent there expecting my eyes to feast on a breathtaking landscape of pristine clear water against a picturesque mountain backdrop. What I saw was a pile full of trash consisting of food and plastic waste that tourists had left behind on that scenic piece of land. The lake had become murky with the garbage that had been dumped recklessly into it. My friend recalled this story when she visited the famous lake Saiful Malook in the northern areas of Pakistan. Lake Saiful Malook is famous for its clear blue water and the lush green valley in which it is situated. Its spectacular beauty draws in flocks of tourists each year.

But this is not just one account, there are several instances of garbage being thrown around by people when they visit such natural places be it beaches, national parks, or the mountains. The same can be seen on beaches in Karachi and other areas in the northern part of Pakistan. As tourism has increased in Pakistan during the last few years both by domestic and foreign tourists, it has also led to the problem of waste management in tourist areas. It has shown that sometimes people visit these places not caring about the well-being of the local people as well as their environment. Open waste disposal in lakes harms marine life and destroys the natural beauty.

Littering in green spaces also disturbs the ecosystems that these are part of. It can also endanger the well-being of the locals. It is disrespectful to the environment and the local people.

The need of the hour in Pakistan lies in something called ecotourism. Ecotourism is defined by The International Ecotourism Society as "responsible travel to natural areas that helps to conserve the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and

education". It raises the slogan "Take only photos, leave only footprints".

It involves visiting places of nature to learn and preserve the environment. It cares for the well-being of the local populace of that area by responsibly visiting those areas. It's a learning experience for both the tourists and the locals underscored with civic sense and respect.

An example of ecotourism helping locals is by employing them as tourist guides when tourists visit thus, providing a source of livelihood for them. It encourages tourists, hotel operators, locals, and governments to be economically responsible people.

In Pakistan, ecotourism has recently gained traction and many initiatives have been started to implement this. To employ this method effectively in Pakistan there is a dire need for each one of us to play our part. For the government, it is essential to enforce those laws that are already there but have lacked enforcement. This is perhaps the most effective way of getting tourists to respect their surroundings. This can be done by imposing heavy fines for littering the natural areas. For hotels, it is imperative to not locate the hotel at the actual site but away from it so its beauty can be preserved as hotels are also part of the problem. Many hotels in Pakistan are now engaging in responsible architecture methods by utilizing sustainable materials during construction. They are also trying to dispose of their waste more sustainably. Some are encouraging their visitors to preserve the environment by planting trees. The importance of individual responsibility cannot be overemphasized in this regard. For us as individuals, it is necessary to take great care when visiting these places so as not to disturb the natural ecosystem and living area of the flora and fauna of that place. Taking care by not disposing trash openly, and carrying bags made of cloth rather than plastic bags goes a long way in preserving the environment. Also

buying from local independent businesses is a way of directing the funds back to the local community. It is important to book lodging in hotels that recycle their waste and take care not to harm the environment. Taking travel tours and booking hotels run by locals is essential in ensuring their benefit. It is pertinent to educate people on the ethics of tourism through the effective use of print and electronic media.

In Pakistan, many initiatives have been carried out to encourage eco-tourism. The Sustainable Tourism Foundation Pakistan (STFP) has been formed as a non-profit and non-political organization by professionals from the tourism industry as well as environmentalists to promote environmentally responsible and sustainable tourism in Pakistan. It also has several publications on ecotourism. Other initiatives like a joint project between governments in Pakistan and the United Nations Development program called Ecotourism and Camping Villages project across scenic locations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan have provided a source of income to the local youth while for tourists it is an opportunity to experience the beauty of nature while engaging in ecotourism. The project aims to inspire other green ecotourism operators to set up similar projects in Pakistan. As tourism in Pakistan continues to grow because of greater and smoother access. This will entail substantial simultaneous efforts towards responsible ecotourism. Several other initiatives have also been taken at the local government level to ensure the safety of natural habitats.

The issue of pollution at tourist sites is a global issue. It can be tackled by engaging all the relevant stakeholders at all levels. Let us all play our part in making tourism in Pakistan eco-friendly so that these places can be preserved for the coming generations.

The writer is a student. She can be reached at ayshaeman346@gmail.com

Atrocities in Occupied Kashmir and Propaganda against Pak Army III

Pakistan has consistently extended political support and solidarity to Azad Jammu and Kashmir. This support is evident in various international forums where Pakistan advocates for the rights of the Kashmiri people and highlights the longstanding issue of Kashmir. Pakistan's diplomatic efforts are crucial in bringing global attention to the situation in AJK and fostering a greater understanding of the region's aspirations for self-determination. Economic collaboration between Pakistan and AJK is vital for the develop-

ment of both regions. Pakistan has played a pivotal role in supporting the economic growth of AJK through various projects, infrastructure development, and trade initiatives. The Karakoram Highway, which connects Pakistan to China through AJK, serves as a testament to the economic importance of the region and the collaborative efforts between Pakistan and AJK. The security of Azad Jammu and Kashmir is intrinsically linked to Pakistan's defense strategy. Given the volatile geopolitical landscape in the region, Pakistan plays a crucial role in ensuring the safety and sovereignty of AJK. The two regions collaborate closely on defense matters, and Pakistan provides security assistance to AJK to safeguard its borders and protect its residents. The people of Pakistan and AJK share strong cultur-

al and social affinities. This commonality in language, traditions, and values creates a sense of unity and belonging. Exchange programs, cultural events, and people-to-people interactions further strengthen the bond between Pakistan and AJK, fostering a shared identity and mutual understanding.

Dear readers, the contributions of Pakistan and Pak Army in Azad Jammu and Kashmir go beyond conventional defense responsibilities. Pak Army's multifaceted involvement in security, disaster relief, infrastructure development, and community welfare reflects a comprehensive commitment to the well-being of the people in AJK. As the region continues to confront challenges, the Pakistan Army remains resolute in its dedication to ensuring a secure and prosperous future for Azad Jammu and Kashmir. It is crucial to recognize the services of the Pak Army for the entire country and, specifically, for AJK. Presently, it is imperative to draw attention to the situation in Occupied Kashmir, condemning the atrocities committed by the Indian Army against innocent Kashmiris. Loyalty to Pakistan and the Pak Army is paramount, utilizing all available forces and resources to advocate for the right of self-determination for Kashmiris. Additionally, it is essential to vigilantly monitor elements that align with our adversaries, and stringent action should be taken against anti-state entities.



Analysis

Abdul Basit Alvi

President makes condolatory phone calls to families of 20 martyred soldiers

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday telephoned the families of 20 soldiers who were martyred in a terrorist attack in Dera Ismail Khan on December 12 and conveyed his condolences. During the telephonic interaction, the president paid tribute to the martyred soldiers and expressed sympathies for the grieved families.

He held telephonic interaction with the family members of haval-dars Imran Khan, Muhammad Jamil, Muhammad Shahab, Fazzal Subhan, Daud Shah and Riasat Khan. He also spoke with the families of Naik Mukhtar Ali, Lance Naik Muhammad Ishaq, Muhammad Hayat and Sagheer Ahmed, sops Rehman Shah, Ghulam Murtaza, Muhammad Fayyaz, Ameer Hussain, Adnan, Muhammad Naseer, Waqarullah Khan, Wali Khan, Zulfiqar and Nabeel Akhtar. President Alvi strongly condemned the terrorist attack and saluted the soldiers who embraced



martyrdom for the homeland. He also paid tribute to the soldiers on behalf of the whole nation for their services to the country and expressed gratitude to their respective families. The president also prayed to Allah Almighty for elevation of the stature of martyrs in paradise and patience for the bereaved families.

President Tokayev calls for revitalization of Nauryz Celebration, emphasizing its cultural significance

News Desk

ASTANA: President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized the cultural significance of celebrating Nauryz, the Kazakh New Year, in a fresh and meaningful manner during a Jan. 3 interview with Egemen Qazaqstan newspaper. Despite the global celebration of the New Year, Tokayev urged citizens not to overlook Nauryz observed on March 22.

While acknowledging the recent New Year as a milestone tied to the change of calendar dates, President Tokayev clarified that it lacks a sacred meaning for him. He reiterated the importance of honoring Nauryz, emphasizing its symbolic representa-



tion of the commencement of a new life cycle in nature. President Tokayev stressed the need for a fresh and creative approach to Nauryz festivities to rejuvenate the celebration, suggesting incorporating new distinctive elements to mark the

occasion. He believes that this innovative approach will contribute to the consolidation of society and the reinforcement of national identity. "Nauryz symbolizes renewal, and it should be celebrated in a new way: meaningfully, creatively, introducing new distinctive elements. I am sure this will contribute to society's consolidation and strengthening of our national identity," stated President Tokayev.

In concluding remarks, Tokayev extended heartfelt wishes for happiness and prosperity to all compatriots. He emphasized the importance of harmony and tranquility in the country, expressing hopes for Kazakhstan's continued prosperity.

Ethiopia's access to sea crucial for regional integration, peace & prosperity: Ambassador Jemal

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Wednesday said the Government of Ethiopia had achieved aspirations of its people by securing access to the sea which was crucial for regional integration, peace and prosperity.

The Ambassador said signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Somaliland for sea access was a true reflection of the strong commitment of the Government of Ethiopia to the regional integration, collective peace, security and socio-economic development.



He said the credit for this breakthrough goes to H. E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister of FDR Ethiopia, who already won the Nobel Peace Prize for his strong commitment to peace and prosperity.

H. E. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had a clear vision not only for the development in Ethiopia but for the entire Africa and the world, the ambassador remarked.

The Ambassador said Ethiopia was already sharing its resources with the neighboring countries in Africa fostering strong connections with the brotherly countries. Currently, Ethiopia was exporting energy to Djibouti, Kenya and Sudan contribut-

ing to the regional integration and development in a massive way, he added.

The work on Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam was almost completed which would not only produce more than 5,150 Megawatts of the electricity, but also supplement efforts of the Government of Ethiopia in promoting regional development and prosperity, the Ambassador noted.

Ambassador Jemal Beker expressed gratitude to H. E. Muse Bili Abdi, President of Somaliland, for supporting Ethiopia's quest for access to the sea.

Caretaker PM expresses deep grief over loss of lives in terrorist attack in Kerman

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday expressed his deep grief over the huge loss of lives in terrorist attacks in Kerman, Iran. On X, the prime minister said that Pakistan condemned this heinous act and stood in solidarity with Iran.



"Our thoughts and prayers are with the Iranian Government and people at this difficult time," he further posted. According to global media outlets and Iranian state media report, at least 103 people were killed by two bomb explosions near the tomb of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani on his fourth anniversary. A large number of people were wounded when the blasts hit a procession near the Saheb al-Zaman mosque in the southern city of Kerman.

Pakistan strongly condemns terrorist attack in Kerman, Iran

City desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday strongly condemned a dastardly terrorist attack that took place earlier today in the Martyrs Cemetery of the provincial capital of Kerman, Iran, resulting in large number of deaths and injuries. "Pakistan stands in full solidarity with the Government and brotherly people of Iran in this hour of grief and tragedy," Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a press statement.

Pakistan believed that terrorism was a menace and threat to regional and global peace and security that needed to be confronted through bilateral and regional cooperation, it was added. "We extend heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and pray for the swift recovery of the injured," the spokesperson said.

BRICS expansion shows bright prospects: Wang Wenbin

Spokesman Report

BEIJING: The expansion of BRICS shows its bright prospects, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin.



Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Ethiopia joined BRICS on January 1, doubling its membership from five to 10, he said during his regular briefing. Wang said China is fully confident in the future of BRICS, and noted that the BRICS cooperation mechanism has increased cohesiveness and influence and become a positive and stable force for good in international affairs.

At the request of relevant countries, the membership of BRICS was expanded, which serves the common aspiration of emerging markets and developing countries, and follows the global trend towards multipolarity, Wang said.

"We will work with BRICS partners to strive for new results in greater BRICS cooperation," the spokesperson added.

BRICS, originally comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, got five new members, Egypt, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia on Monday. Argentina was also due to join BRICS after receiving an invitation in August 2023. However, newly elected President Javier Milei announced on Friday that Argentina would not join the BRICS framework of developing economies.

Madinah health cluster wins anti-smoking award

News Desk

MADINAH: The Madinah Health Cluster has won the Anti-Smoking Award "Makeen", granted by the Arab Union for Humanities and Development, for being the best provider of services focused on stopping smoking in the Arab world.

The award, the first of its kind for efforts to combat smoking in the Arab region, aims to support this endeavor. It is given annually to institutions and individuals who present the best activities or achievements that support healthy living and combat smoking.

Pakistan-China Friendship Hospital in Gwadar prepares for first patients

News Desk

BEIJING: The Pakistan-China Friendship Hospital in the port city of Gwadar is preparing to admit its first patients. The foundation stone for the hospital was laid in 2020. It's part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and it's been called a symbol of the two countries' deep-rooted friendship.

Zhou Wenwei, Chief Consultant, Pakistan-China Friendship Hospital told CGTN, "China and Pakistan have a long history of friendship, and in the course of the Belt and Road Initiative, China wanted to invest in this hospital in Gwadar to benefit the local people." Just days before its formal inauguration, I was given exclusive access to the 150-bed facility. "The Pak-China Friendship Hospital is equipped with modern facilities and advanced medical technology, ensuring that residents of Gwadar and the surrounding areas have access to high-quality healthcare."

S. Korea opposition leader in ICU after knife attack amid calls for stronger security

Reuters

SEOUL: South Korea's opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung remained hospitalized in intensive care on Wednesday, a day after a knife attack on him shocked political leaders who were vying for the upper hand in a major election three months away.

Surgeons operated on Lee for more than two hours late on Wednesday to repair a major blood vessel in his neck that was sliced when an assailant lunged and stabbed him with a knife.

"The act of terror against Chairman Lee Jae-myung was clearly a challenge against democracy and a threat against democracy," Democratic Party

floor leader Hong Ik-pyo said at a party leadership council meeting.

He urged a speedy investigation and tougher security for high-profile political figures, echoing renewed questions about the safety on campaign trails in a country with a history of political violence despite tight restrictions on gun ownership.

Jin Jeong-hwa, a party supporter who was a witness at the scene of the stabbing, said the incident clearly showed the need for stronger and professional security protection for political leaders, not simply police who are deployed to monitor.

"People like opposition leaders really need a dedicated security detail," Jin said in an interview with Reuters. He added it

was clear from his experience at political events that Lee was very much exposed to personal safety threats.

Lee, a tough talking progressive who narrowly lost the 2022 presidential election, had been rallying the party to retain the parliamentary majority it holds against President Yoon Suk Yeol's conservatives.

South Korea holds a pivotal election on April 10 where the conservatives will try to win back a majority for the first time since 2016 and help President Yoon Suk Yeol's pro-business policies including tax cuts, deregulation and social reforms.

The attack against Lee, which unfolded quickly but was widely captured in footage of the

outdoors public event, shocked his party and his rivals alike, who condemned all violence against political figures.

Lee was airlifted from Busan, where the attack occurred, to Seoul on Tuesday where he received surgery to reconstruct the jugular vein that pumps blood from the head back to the heart and insert a tube to support the damaged vessel.

He was conscious and recovering in the intensive care unit, party officials said.

The leader of the conservative People Power Party scaled back scheduled public events, and both parties urged members to refrain from comments that could inflame voters as Lee recuperates.



Lee lost to Yoon by less than 1% point of votes, the narrowest margin, in a bitterly fought

presidential election and has since faced bribery allegations stemming from a development

project when he was mayor of a city near Seoul. He denies wrongdoing.

Bull & Bears
PSX 100-Share
Index Fluctuation

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index

Current	Prev. Close
64,646.84	64,349.60
Day's High	Day's Low
65,244.60	64,219.54
Index Value	Change
16,046,380,240	+297.24
Percentage	Time
+0.46%	3 Jan, 2024 5:00 pm

Europe: FTSE 100 Index

Index Value	Change
7,682.33	-39.19
Percentage	Time
-0.51%	3 Jan, 4:22 pm GMT

USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average

Index Value	Change
37,566.02	-149.02
Percentage	Time
-0.40%	3 Jan, 1:32 pm GMT-5

Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average

Index Value	Change
33,464.17	-75.45
Percentage	Time
-0.22%	29 Dec, 3:15 pm GMT+9

Open Market Forex Rates

Currency	Buying	Selling
Australian Dollar	189.5	191.5
Bahrain Dinar	750.01	758.01
Canadian Dollar	210	212
China Yuan	39.64	40.04
Danish Krone	41.45	41.85
Euro	308.5	311.5
Hong Kong Dollar	35.96	36.31
Indian Rupee	3.39	3.5
Japanese Yen	1.95	2.04
Kuwaiti Dinar	916.95	925.95
Malaysian Ringgit	61.19	61.79
New Zealand \$	176.57	178.57
Norwegians Krone	27.47	27.77
Omani Riyal	732.5	740.5
Qatari Riyal	77.45	78.15
Saudi Riyal	74.45	75.2
Singapore Dollar	210	212
Swedish Korona	27.97	28.27
Swiss Franc	322.39	334.89
Thai Bhat	8.18	8.33
U.A.E Dirham	76.6	77.3
UK Pound Sterling	358.5	362
US Dollar	280.5	283

Positive impact

Transparent elections will decrease political tensions, says Mian Zahid Hussain

Tariq Khattak

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Wednesday that inflation, current account deficit and interest rate will decrease in the New Year.

There is a possibility of an increase in business activities, employment and GDP which will have a positive impact, he said.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the political temperature would decrease if elections were transparent; if it is not, political instability will continue, and the new government will be unable to implement reforms.

Talking to the business community, the



veteran business leader said that regional tensions, climate change, and food and oil

prices can rise during this year, which could undermine efforts to stabilize the economy.

He said that the policymakers need to speed up the economic recovery efforts so that the problems of the people and the business community can be reduced.

Mian Zahid Hussain added that last year, Pakistan had to go through the most difficult situation in its history and there was an endless series of problems to deal with, including loans from IMF and friendly countries.

However, it has become difficult to continue this trend as Pakistan's industrialists have lost their competitiveness in the global market due to the huge increase in the cost of doing business, he observed.

Mian Zahid Hussain further said that the future of the country will be decided by whether the rulers have tried to learn from past expe-

riences or not because if they continue with their previous style, then economic stability will become a dream.

During this year, apart from the elections, taking new loans from the IMF will also be a big challenge, requiring strong efforts and implementation of visible reforms.

Without these loans, repayment of past debts would be impossible and imports would become very difficult. If the politicians show prudence, financial institutions, tax and other reforms will be possible and governance will be improved, which will improve the country's condition.

But if politicians decide to follow the same old path, the country will be bankrupt. This time the new government will have to take decisions on merit and keep the economy separate from politics.

Mir says all the conditions for making it scheduled bank have been fulfilled

Abdul Majeed Tahir

MUZAFFARABAD: Azad Jammu and Kashmir Bank Acting President Shahid shezad Mir said that all the conditions for making Kashmir Bank a scheduled bank have been fulfilled. According to the instructions of Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq, under the guidance of Finance Minister Abdul Majid Khan, Chief Secretary Dawood Breech, the goals will be completed within six months.

Talking to the media after meeting the delegations of all the schools of life who were congratulated by the political leaders and representatives of civil society Shahid Mir said that they have successfully completed the journey of modern banking facilities to set up to eighty-two branches of Kashmir Bank. They are engaged in public service and six to eight more branches will be established in remote areas this year.

Shahid Mir said that due to



the interest of the government, Kashmir Bank has become the most profitable institution. He said that it is not only Azad Kashmir. There will be a global breakthrough for Kashmiri people all over the world, including Pakistan, after which the independent region will be brought to the goal of economic self-sufficiency, which will be national good news. A loan scheme is in operation for Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq and Finance Minister Abdul Majid Khan.

ICCI and CAP demand rationalization of high taxes on construction industry

PNP

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of the Constructors Association of Pakistan (CAP) led by its Chairman Engr. Syed Ashfaq Hussain visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and highlighted the issue of high taxes on the construction industry due to which this industry is facing a lot of problems in promoting construction activities. Engr. Sikandar Hayat Khatkhat former Chairman CAP, Malik Muhammad Azim Member Advisory Council, and others were in the delegation.

Addressing the delegation, Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Acting Pres-

ident, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the construction industry plays a key role in the economic development of the country as the business activities of around 70 allied industries are associated with the construction sector. However, the imposition of high taxes on this industry has badly affected its growth, discouraged new investment, and caused a slowdown in the overall economy. He said that the cut in taxes on this industry can attract investment of billions of dollars to the country and stressed that the government should rationalize taxes on this sector in consultation with stakeholders, withdraw tax on deemed income on immova-

ble property, and create a conducive environment to spur the economic growth of the country.

Speaking on the occasion, Engr. Syed Ashfaq Hussain, Chairman, Constructors Association of Pakistan said that many Overseas Pakistanis are interested in investing in the construction sector, but heavy taxes are discouraging them. He emphasized that the government should reconsider taxes on this sector and offer more attractive incentives to this industry to boost foreign investment in the country. He said that the government can take the country's economy from recession to sustainable development by focusing on the real estate and construction sector.

Welcomed

FPCCI Will Devise Charter of Economy to Meet the Economic Challenges



PPA

ISLAMABAD: Newly elected President FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh arrives in the FPCCI Capital Office Islamabad with a big crowd consisting of the members of business community of Islamabad and adjacent areas. The Chairman Capital Office Karim Aziz Malik and Chairman Coordination Malik Sohail Hussain and Vice Presidents of FPCCI namely Ashfaq Ahmed and Tariq Jadoon, warmly welcomed him and showered flower leaves on him. On this occasion, on a festive event, special band was arranged to congratulate him and celebrated his historic victory in FPCCI's election. Earlier the crowd escorted him from his residence to FPCCI Capital House Islamabad.

Various business leaders of UBG and Founder Group of Islamabad CCI prominently Zubair Malik, Tariq Sadiq, Former Presidents FPCCI Rauf Alam, Zubair Ahmed Malik, former Vice President PCCI and Gener-

al Secretary UBG Zafar Bakhtawari, Chairman Founder Group ICCI Khalid Iqbal Malik, Mian Akram Farid, Mian Shaukat Masood, Mohammad Ijaz Abbasi, Khalid Javed, Tariq Sadiq, Acting President ICCI Engineer Azhar-ul-Islam, President Islamabad Woman Chamber Rizwana Asif, and All Officials of Islamabad and Rawalpindi All Trade Bodies, businessmen, industrialists were present on the occasion and expressed their views.

While speaking during the ceremony, FPCCI's newly elected President Atif Ikram Sheikh said that all will have to work jointly to solve the problems of the country's development, industry, commerce, business and investment, to solve the problems of the business community.

He stressed on devising charter of economy to bring out Pakistan from current economic crises.

Further he said that trade and industry is the engine of Pakistan's economy which need to strengthen and the business community is the driver of trade

and industry.

He said that the energy crisis is intensifying, industries are closing down, joint efforts of public and private sector are needed to solve problems. He added that it is our responsibility to bring out the country from economic challenges. The government institutions and political parties should include the business community as stakeholders in business policy making.

On this occasion, Karim Aziz Malik Chairman Capital Office Islamabad urged to review economic policies. The government has to make long-term and consistent policies for development and improvement of the industry. He said that the continuous increase in electricity and gas prices could endanger the pace of industrial growth.

Sohail Malik said that FPCCI has its fingers on the pulse of our economy and we know the problems and difficulties that are facing by the business community. He said that all Chambers of Commerce, Trade associations are now united under one roof of FPCCI.

Zuhair Ali Sayyad shares his career in the energy sector

Interview by Tahir Amin Malik

Q. No.1: when you started your career in Business tell us about your education career as well.

Career and Education in Business
My career in the business sector, particularly in solar energy (Under the umbrella of my father like Boss & Group CEO Abdul Waheed) began 9 years ago, coinciding with my engagement at Power Tech International Ltd (with leading brand Omega power) since its inception in 2014. My educational background is deeply rooted in business studies, with a focus on renewable energy technologies. This unique blend of business acumen and technical knowledge of sustainable energy solutions has been instrumental in my career progression.

Q. No.2: When the Power Tech International was established.

Establishment of Power Tech International
Power Tech International Ltd was established in 1990. Since its inception, the company has been at the forefront of innovation in the energy sector, driven by a commitment to sustainable energy solutions.

Q. No.3: What are your industrial Lab Instruments/Equipment's please share the detail?

Industrial Lab Instruments and Equipment
Our industrial lab is equipped with state-of-the-art instruments and equipment. These include solar simulators, photovoltaic (PV) module testers, and energy efficiency analyzers. Our focus is on ensuring the highest quality and performance standards for our solar products.

Q. No. 4: Where is your Company Head Office and Sub Offices located?

Company Offices
The head office of Power Tech International Ltd. is strategically located in Lahore with several sub-offices across Karachi, Islamabad, Multan, Peshawar & Quetta. These locations enable us to efficiently manage our operations and maintain close relationships with our clients globally.

Q. No.5: What is the response of your company's products in the market?

Market Response to Products
The response to our products in the market has been overwhelmingly positive. Our commitment to quality and innovation has earned us a reputation as a reliable provider of solar energy solutions. This is reflected in our

growing customer base and repeat business.

Q. No.6: What are your company's leading positions in all sectors regarding your products?

Company's Leading Position
In the solar energy sector, Power Tech International Ltd holds a leading position, particularly in the areas of quality product innovation, customer service, and sustainable practices. Our products are known for their efficiency, durability, and adaptability to various environments.

Q. No.7: Why do you think Solar Energy is important?

Importance of Solar Energy
Solar energy is crucial for sustainable development. It's a clean, inexhaustible resource that reduces our dependence on fossil fuels, thus mitigating climate change impacts. Solar energy solutions also foster economic growth by creating green jobs and enhancing energy security.

Q. No.8: Please tell us about your achievements and how many countries you have visited so far?

Career Achievements and Travel
My career has been marked by significant achievements, including expanding our market reach and driving innovation in solar technology. I've had the opportunity to visit countries like China, Dubai, and Malaysia, Qatar, UK & Saudi Arabia which has broadened my perspective and understanding of the global solar energy market.

Q. No.9: What was your career experience before working in Omega Power?

Previous Career Experience
Before joining Power Tech, my experience spanned various roles in the energy sector, where I developed a deep understanding of market dynamics and technological advancements in solar energy.

Q. No.10 Are you satisfied with your products?

Client Satisfaction and Power Systems
For clients seeking sustainable power solutions, we offer customized systems that ensure optimal performance and reliability. Post-installation, we provide comprehensive support and monitoring services to guarantee client satisfaction.

Q. No.11: What are your career goals within the solar field?

Career Goals in Solar Field
My career goal within the solar field is to drive the transition towards renewable energy globally, focusing on innovative solutions and sustainable practices.



AIOU resumes extra-curricular activities

ISLAMABAD: "There is a dire need to attract children to co-curricular and extra-curricular activities along with studies. These activities instil the spirit of hard work and in students. Sports activities were halted due to pandemic, Now resuming those healthy activities is a very good initiative", said Vice Vice Chancellor, Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood while addressing the prize distribution ceremony of AIOU Annual Cricket Tournament 2024.

The Vice Chancellor emphasized the importance of sports in the physical and mental development of children and announced that sports activities will be organized in the university's regional campuses. Additionally, he mentioned that the renovation of residential colony blocks and the ground is in the planning stage, and sufficient funds will be allocated in the budget. During a briefing on sports activities, Director of Student Affairs, Syed Ghulam Kazim Ali, informed the Vice



Chancellor that cricket, badminton, table tennis and football teams have been formed at AIOU, and 60 teams participated in this cricket tournament with a total of 50 matches played.

DSA said that there were 2 cate-

gories in this tournament, one was the students' category, and the other was the AIOU employees' category. The student category tournament was won by the university residential colony team while the final match of

employees' category was played today between the admin and DRS teams, DRS team bags the winning trophy. At the end of the final match, all four finalist teams were introduced to the Vice Chancellor.

Nominees for ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year 2023 announced

A Sports

DUBAI: The nominees for the International Cricket Council (ICC) Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year 2023 were announced on Wednesday, featuring top players from Australia, England, Sri Lanka and West Indies.

Top-ranked women's T20I bowler Sophie Ecclestone alongside all-rounders Ellyse Perry, Chamari Athapaththu and Hayley Matthews were shortlisted by the apex cricketing body for the prestigious ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year Award 2023.

Sri Lankan veteran Athapaththu had a year to remember as she scored 470 runs and also picked up eight wickets in her 16 outings in the format.

Athapaththu started 2023 with a Player of the Match performance in Cape Town in the Women's T20 World



Cup, notching up 68 off 50 balls and powering Sri Lanka to beat South Africa.

The Sri Lankan all-rounder then hit a purple patch in the second half of the year, the highlight of which was an unbeaten 80 in 47 balls in Colombo to help Sri Lanka pull back a win in the three-match series against New Zealand.

She then also played a pivotal role in her side's series triumph over England in the latter's backyard.

England's Sophie Eccle-

stone had a remarkable year with the ball as she claimed 23 wickets in just 11 matches at 10.60.

The top-ranked T20I bowler shone in the Women's T20 World Cup, picking up 11 wickets, the most by anyone in the tournament.

Her sensational performance in the mega event saw her go past 800 rating points, becoming just the second bowler to do so in the ICC Women's T20I Bowling rankings.

West Indies all-rounder

Hayley Matthews enjoyed a successful year amid which she raised 700 runs and also bagged 19 wickets in 14 matches.

Her best performance of the year 2023 came in the three-match away series against Australia.

She recorded the scores 99, 132 and 79 as the West Indies captain turned out to be a thorn for the Australian side.

Despite having a surprisingly ordinary campaign in the Women's T20 World Cup, experienced Australian all-rounder Ellyse Perry had a stellar year as she not only scored 319 runs but also took six wickets in 14 matches.

Perry ended the year on a positive note by recording scores of 51, 34, 70 and 40 in the bilateral series against England and West Indies.

With 11 sixes in a year, Perry also surpassed her personal best and showcased a different approach in the

ICC unveils nominees for Emerging Cricketer of the Year Awards

A Sports



A Sports

DUBAI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday, unveiled the nominees for the Emerging Cricketer of the Year 2023 Awards for both Men and Women's categories.

New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra, South Africa's Gerald Coetzee, Sri Lanka's Dilshan Madushanka and India's Yashasvi Jaiswal were nominated for the Men's Emerging Cricketer of the Year 2023 award.

Young left-handed opener Ravindra's career took a giant stride in the ICC Men's ODI World Cup 2023 where he accumulated 578 runs, only behind Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Quinton de Kock.

His tally was also the highest by a New Zealand batter in a World Cup.

Rachin Ravindra had a stellar year in white ball cricket. He scored 820 runs in ODIs and also took 18 wickets at 46.61.

Right-arm pacer Gerald Coetzee emerged as an all-format pacer for South Africa in 2023. Coetzee picked up 10 wickets at 21.70 in Tests, 31 wickets at 23.22 in ODIs and six wickets at 23.33 in T20Is.

He finished as the fourth-highest wicket-taker of the ICC World Cup 2023, making 20 scalps in eight matches and leading South Africa's pace attack from the front.

Another pacer who came to the limelight during the World Cup was Sri Lanka's Dilshan Madushanka.

The left-arm pacer came in as an injury replacement for Dushmantha Chameera during the Qualifiers for the Cricket World Cup and cashed in the opportunity. He emerged as a stand-out bowler for Sri Lanka in the mega event where he picked up 21 wickets in nine matches. In 2023 as a whole, Madushanka claimed 31 wickets at 24.06 in ODIs and six wickets at 33 in T20Is. 22-year-old Indian opener Yashasvi Jaiswal made heads turned with his consistent performances in Tests and T20I cricket.

The left-handed opener scored 288 runs at 57.60 in Tests and 430 runs at 33.07 in T20Is which earned him a spot in the nominees for the Emerging Men's Cricketer of the Year award. On the other hand, two breakout pacers from Bangladesh and England, Marufa Akter

ICC shortlist nominees for Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year Award

A Sports

DUBAI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday, announced the nominees for the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year Award for 2023.

Suryakumar Yadav, who won the prestigious award in 2022, has been nominated this year too following his sublime record in T20Is while Zimbabwe's Sikander Raza, New Zealand's Mark Chapman and Uganda's Alpeh Ramjani are the other three nominees.

Yadav accumulated 733 runs at an average of 48.86 in 17 innings with a hefty strike rate of 155.95.

Yadav had a contrasting start to what was a prolific year as he managed just seven runs against Sri Lanka before making a grand comeback with the scores of 51 (36) and 112* (51) in the next two



matches.

The right-handed batter kept piling runs to his name with consistent scores ranging from 20 to 40 before an innings of 83 (44) against the West Indies in Providence, followed by a 61-run knock in Florida.

Suryakumar scored half-centuries against Australia and South Africa and ended his prolific year in T20I cricket with a hundred against South Africa off just

56 balls.

Star Zimbabwean all-rounder Sikander Raza once again made it to the shortlisted players for the Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year Award.

He showcased his all-round prowess by accumulating 515 runs at 51.50 in 11 innings coming at a brilliant strike rate of 150.

Raza also picked up 17 wickets at 14.88, leaking runs at a low economy of 6.5.

New Zealand's rising middle-order batter Mark Chapman also got the reward for his outstanding performances in the shortest format. He enjoyed a purple patch with the bat which yielded 576 runs at 44.3 in 19 innings in 2023.

Chapman announced his presence amid the T20I tour of Pakistan where he scored 290 runs in the five-match series including a match-winning hundred in the last fixture.

Uganda's Ramjani, who was a nightmare for the batters in 2023, also made it to the nominees for the prestigious award.

He made 55 scalps in T20Is at an astounding average of 8.9 and a marvellous economy of 4.7.

His 55 wickets in 30 outings was the most among men's players in the format across the year.

Novak Djokovic wrist injury dooms Serbia to Australia defeat

Sports Desk

LAHORE: Novak Djokovic suffered a frustrating fitness saga as a wrist problem led to the Serb's upset 6-4, 6-4 loss to Australia's Alex de Minaur in the quarter-finals of the United Cup in Perth on Wednesday.

Djokovic, who received multiple massages on court on his troublesome right wrist — hurt in training 24 hours earlier — fell victim to an inspired de Minaur, who led his side into the weekend semi-finals in Sydney.

Ajla Tomljanovic then sealed the 2-0 win for the team with her 6-1, 6-1 defeat of Serb 184th-ranked substitute Natalija Stevanovic.

Stevanovic had replaced an exhausted Olga Danilovic, who featured in previous ties here

alongside Djokovic.

World number one Novak Djokovic produced 31 unforced errors as his 43-match win streak in Australia was ended after 93 minutes on court against de Minaur.

"I was not on my level, it was just one of these days where you didn't feel your best," Djokovic said.

"Your opponent played very well. That's all I can say.

"I think I have enough time to get myself in the right shape for the Australian Open, and that's what matters the most at this point.

"I knew I was not going to be at 100 per cent physically, emotionally, mentally game-wise in the opening week of a season.

"It's all a part of the build-up for the Australian Open, that's

where I want to perform at my best."

Victory marked revenge for the low-key de Minaur, beaten by Djokovic a year ago at the Australian Open.

The 24-year-old Australian was recording his first victory over a world number one, adding Djokovic to a list which also includes Rafael Nadal, the number two whom he beat here a year ago.

"This was extremely special, Novak is an unbelievable competitor," de Minaur said.

"This feels surreal, I'm happy to do it here in Australia. When you go against Novak you just have to try and enjoy it.

"You must keep fighting to the end. Today was my day — I'm happy I was able to get the win.

"This one means a lot."

Novak Djokovic was seen twice by the trainer in the opening set and at one point said: "The more I'm playing, it's getting worse."

The 36-year-old with 10 Australian Open trophies was broken once per set, his second mis-cue coming on a double-fault.

Earlier, top-ranked Poland overpowered China, with Hubert Hurkacz and Iga Swiatek propelling them into the United Cup semi-finals with a singles sweep.

The pair of straight-set victories in Perth put the tie out of reach and sent the Poles into a clash against either Norway or France in Sydney.

Adrian Mannarino and Caroline Garcia had earlier booked France a last eight tie against the Norwegians with victory over Italy.



Hurkacz secured a clinical 6-3, 6-4 defeat of Zhang Zhizhen before world number one Swiatek followed up, winning nine games on the trot at one point to beat Zheng Qinwen 6-2, 6-3 despite losing serve twice.

Swiatek was eager to get to Sydney as the first nation to

dismissed Chinese number one Zhang.

"It's always a tough match with him. He can play some amazing shots," the winner said.

In Sydney, journeyman Mannarino, who enjoyed his best-ever season last year, swept past Lorenzo Sonego 6-4, 6-4 before Garcia overcame a stubborn Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.

It gave France an unassailable 2-0 lead to put them into the knockout rounds.

The last quarter-final slot will be decided when Greece meet Canada, with the winner facing the best runner-up from group play in Sydney.

The United Cup quarter-finals are played on Thursday and Friday before the semis on Saturday and the final a day later.



SARGODHA: Players in action during Sargodha Squash League organized by Sargodha Division Squash Association at Squash Complex Sports Stadium.

Aamir Jamal reveals his approach to counter Australia pacers



A Sports

LAHORE: Pakistan pacer Aamir Jamal on Wednesday talked about his memorable half-century in the ongoing third Test against Australia in Sydney.

Aamir Jamal took the cricketing world by storm as he scored his maiden Test half-century. He scored 82 runs off 97 balls with nine boundaries and four sixes.

His knock helped Pakistan post a competitive total of 313 in their first innings.

The right-arm pacer talked about his impressive batting performance in the press conference after the first day's play. According to him, it meant the world to him.

"It means alot, it means the world to me," he told the media. "Last time I came to Sydney, I was cheering up my team because I wasn't playing for Pakistan. It's a huge moment for me, for my family as well. It was lovely to watch everyone on the feet when I was walking out and I love it."

Aamir Jamal added that he was prepared to face the relentless bouncers by Australia bowlers as they bowl short-pitched deliveries to tail-enders.

"We were talking about the bowlers, we knew they were gonna come hard on us, so what we needed to do was just stick to the plan given from the coaching staff. I was mentally ready because at my position, they [Australian bowlers] want to bowl every ball a bouncer to get us, but when you made up your mind to play those pull shots then you can play," he said.

He revealed that he had dedicated his celebration to Pakistan's assistant batting coach Shahid Aslam as he has helped him overcome his fears and worries.

"Our batting assistant coach, Shahid bhai, and I were sitting together for 45 minutes when I wasn't batting. I shared some personal things with him, which were causing me to struggle in my batting. So, he sat with me and guided me. So today, after sitting with him for 45 minutes, he brought me out of the thing I was stuck in, and that celebration was for him," he added.

SA vs IND: Numerous records break on day one of Cape Town Test

Cape Town witnessed cricket history as 23 wickets crashed on the first day, surpassing the record set over a century ago in 1902.

In 1902, during the match between England and Australia, 25 wickets fell on the first day. In 1890, 22 wickets were taken on the opening day of a match. Overall, this marks the fourth-highest tally of wickets in a single day.

In 1888, during the England-Australia match, 27 wickets fell on the second day. In 1896, the second day of the first Test saw 24 wickets fall. Similarly, in 2018, the second day of the India-Afghanistan match in Chennai witnessed 24 wickets taken.

In Cape Town, during the South Africa-Australia Test in 2011, 23 wickets were lost on the second day of the match.

Meanwhile, the first two innings lasted 349 balls, the second-fewest in 147 years of test cricket. The only shorter instance was 287 deliveries between Australia and England in 1902.

Earlier, India's last six wickets in the first innings fell without adding any runs to the scoreboard.

This marks the first instance in Test cricket where six wickets collapsed within a span of just 11 balls, an unprecedented occurrence in the sport's history. Previously, there were only four recorded instances of five wickets falling without a run being scored.

Prior to this, the narrowest run margin during the fall of six wickets stood at just 1 run. Notably, during the Rawalpindi Test in 1965, New Zealand faced a similar situation, losing six wickets with the addition of only one run.

In another record, seven players had a score of 0—this happened for the first time in Test history

Knowledge

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Arif Alvi being briefed about the role and performance on National Book Foundation, at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Wednesday.



Photo: PID

President for increasing access of visually impaired to books, education

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday directed to take necessary actions aimed at greater access of the visually impaired to books and knowledge. Chairing a meeting to review the role and performance of National Book Foundation at Aiwan-e-Sadr,

the president said that the intellectual and individual development was possible by promoting the culture of book reading in the country.

He said availability of books and knowledge in braille for the visually impaired was a welcome move. During the meeting, Managing Director NBF Dr Raja Mazhar Hameed

briefed the president about role and performance of the Foundation. He said the National Book Foundation was taking measures for the people affected by dyslexia. The meeting was told that the Foundation was preparing books for the dyslexic children from class prep to 8th that would be available during the academic

year 2024-25. It was informed that the Foundation's Braille Press in Karachi was providing the books to the visually impaired for Rs 10 only. The books would help increasing the access of the visually impaired children to education. "The Foundation would issue the books for the visually impaired children of class prep

to 8th of 431 schools of Islamabad." It was further informed in the meeting that the NBF was publishing books in braille on a range of topics and it was also ensuring the availability of books in Pakistan and abroad. President Alvi appreciated the role of the Foundation in promoting literacy and book reading culture in the country.

Bomb blast targets JUI candidate in Bajaur



ABC

BAJAUR: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) candidate Qari Khairullah was targeted by a bomb blast in Tehsil Mamond of Bajaur district.

As per details, the bomb blast occurred near the vehicle of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) candidate Qari Khairullah in Bajaur district.

The JUI candidate survived the blast and remained safe however his vehicle was badly damaged.

Earlier, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUI-F) head Maulana Fazlur Rehman's convoy came under gun attack in DI Khan.

According to sources, the convoy of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman was attacked near DI Khan Yarik interchange however he remained safe with no loss of life reported so far.

However, RPO Nasir Mehmood Dasti refuted reports of attack on

Maulana Fazl's convoy saying the Yarik interchange police checkpost was attacked in DI Khan.

He said that the assailants fled the spot of incident after a strong response from the interchange police. It is pertinent to mention here that the interior ministry earlier warned Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl head Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Awami National Party provincial president Aimal Wali Khan of serious threats to their lives.

In a letter to the chief secretaries and inspector general of police of all provinces, the interior ministry stated that reports have been received from sources alarming of serious threats to the life of both political leaders.

"It is requested that extreme caution and vigilance is exercised and necessary security arrangements are made at their [Mr Fazl and Mr Aimal's] residences and during movement and public gatherings to avert any untoward incident," the letter stated.

Fiscal deficit curtailed at 0.8% of GDP, primary surplus improves

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Owing to consolidated measures implemented by the government, the fiscal deficit has been curtailed to 0.8 percent of GDP during the first four months of the current fiscal year, according to latest report of the finance ministry. "Fiscal side highlights the successful implementation of consolidation measures in the first four months of FY2024, leading to a significant rise in total revenue receipts that outpaced the growth in expenditures," according to Monthly Economic Update and Outlook for December 2023.

Consequently, the fiscal deficit has been curtailed to 0.8 percent of GDP, the report says, adding the primary surplus continued to improve owing to contained growth in non-markup spending and was recorded at Rs.1429.7 billion (1.4 percent of GDP) during July-October FY2024 from Rs.136.2 billion, 0.2 percent of GDP last year. The breakup data shows that the fiscal deficit was recorded at Rs.861.7 billion during the period under review compared to deficit of Rs.1265.8 billion during the same period of last year, which was 1.5 percent of GDP. Meanwhile, the net federal revenue receipts increased to Rs.2806.6 billion in July-October FY2024 from Rs.1316.8 billion last year. The sharp rise in revenues has been largely attributed to considerable improvement in non-tax revenues that grew by more than 300 percent during the period under review. In absolute



terms, it increased to Rs. 1586.5 billion against Rs. 346.4 billion last year. This growth in non-tax collection has been observed across all major heads, indicating a broad-based increase. Similarly, receipts from FBR tax collections grew by 29 percent to Rs.2748.4 billion against Rs.2138.7 billion last year. The net provisional FBR tax collection maintained its momentum with 29.6 percent growth to reach Rs.3484.7 billion during July-November FY2024 from Rs.2688.4 billion last year. Within total, domestic tax revenues grew by 32 percent driven primarily by a 62.8 percent surge in FED and a 42.2 percent rise in direct taxes.

The total expenditures grew by 35 percent to stand at Rs.3706.7 billion during July-October FY2024 against Rs.2737.2 billion last year. Within total, current spending grew by 44 percent mainly due to a significant rise in markup payments that increased by 63 percent during the first four months of the current fiscal year, while non-markup spending witnessed a restricted growth of 19 percent on account of the government's cautious expenditure management strategy.

Sadiq Sanjrani grieved over loss of life in Japan's earthquake



City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Senate Chairman Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani on Wednesday conveyed condolences to President of the House of Councillors of Japan Hidehisa Otsuji over the loss of life in the devastating earthquake.

"I have full faith that legendary resilience and courage of the people of Japan would surely help them to surmount this catastrophe," the

chairman said in the letter forwarded to the office of President of the House of Councillors of Japan.

He also sympathized with the bereaved families and others affected by the heart-wrenching earthquake. Sanjrani expressed unwavering support and solidarity with the people of Japan in the hard times.

He termed Japan a great friend and said that both Islamabad and Tokyo had supported each other through thick and thin.

IHC bars police, admin from using force against Baloch protesters in Islamabad



City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court on Wednesday barred the administration and police in the federal capital from removing the Baloch demonstrators protesting outside the National Press Club by force.

IHC judge Mohsin Akhtar Kayani issued the order while taking up a petition - filed by Baloch activist Sammi Deen Baloch - concerning the alleged harassment and use of force against the Baloch protesters. The judge also summoned the deputy commissioner (DC) and senior superintendent of police (Operations) on the next hearing on Jan 5.

Several Baloch families have been protesting against alleged extrajudicial killings and enforced disappear-

ances outside the National Press Club.

At the outset of proceedings, the petitioner's counsel, Ataullah Kundi, informed the court that Baloch families had staged a sit-in outside the press club in Islamabad, and police had arrested several women and children before the court ordered their release.

He contended that the Islamabad police were harassing the protesters.

When the judge questioned whether or not the protesters were advancing the alleged harassment and use of force against the Baloch protesters, they were not advancing anywhere.

Later, Justice Kayani issued orders barring the authorities from harassing and removing the Baloch protesters by force.

He also summoned the DC and SSP Operations on the next hearing, Jan 5.

Bilawal to chair PPP CEC meeting in Lahore today

Bureau Report

LAHORE: The Central Executive Committee (CEC) meeting of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) will be held in Lahore today (Wednesday). The meeting will discuss strategy for the upcoming elections.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will preside over the meeting at Bilawal House, Lahore. The CEC will discuss the overall political situation in the country. The meeting would be attended by the senior



leadership of PPP.

Discussion will also be held on the PPP manifesto and election campaign for the Feb 8 polls.

Pakistan to establish 'E-Rozgar Centers' for freelancers

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology Dr Umar Saif on Wednesday disclosed that the government would initiate a project to establish 10,000 countrywide E-Rozgar centers equipped with the latest facilities to facilitate freelancers and start-ups from January 11.

This initiative was aimed to address the current challenge faced by approximately 1.5 million freelancers who lacked suitable workspaces, he mentioned while speaking in an interview with a private news channel.

The freelancers equipped with the tools and environment to thrive in the digital landscape is need of the hour, he further added. He explained that the establishment of joint e-rozgar centers will increase investment in the country and create new employment opportunities.

Dr Umar also urged the youth to become



entrepreneurs as they could easily earn more stipends per month through E-Rozgar.

Replying to a question, the minister said from January 7 another project would be initiated to introduce a standardized test for IT graduates through the Higher Education Commission to gauge their skills and offer them internships after passing the Test. "Those who pass the test will be given a mandatory internship in the IT industry. Pakistani universities produce around 75,000 IT graduates every year, out of which, only 3,000 are eligible to be employed by IT companies," he added.

Sartaj Aziz laid to rest in Islamabad graveyard

City Desk

ISLAMABAD:

Former finance minister and senior PML-N leader Sartaj Aziz was laid to rest in Islamabad's H-8 graveyard on Wednesday. People from different walks of life attended his funeral.

Prominent among them were former PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Dr Tariq Fazal Ch, PPP's Farhatullah Babar, Chairman PML-N Raja Zafar ul Haq, Sardar Mehtab Khan Abbasi, former minister Ijaz ul Haq and a large number of diplomats.

According to his family, the Rasm-e-Qul of deceased would be held tomorrow at 3 PM in a farm house at Chak Shehzad, Islamabad.



Pakistan to enhance COVID-19 testing after WHO's alert

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The caretaker government has decided to enhance testing of COVID-19 following an advisory issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) regarding the new variant - "JN.1 Omicron".

The National Command and Operations Center (NCOC) has issued advisory to provincial health departments, pointing out the WHO alert about increase in respiratory infection.

In the advisory, the NCOC pointed out that neighbouring countries were reporting cases of the newly-spread JN-1 variant of COVID-19.

"It has also been observed with serious concerns that number of cases of Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) are rising in the country for the past few weeks," it added.

Keeping in the above-mentioned situation, the NCOC urged all provinces/regions to enhance COVID-19 testing to monitor the real time situation in the country.

On Dec 19, the WHO declared JN.1 "a variant of interest" due to its "rapidly increasing spread".

A day earlier, Federal Health Minister Dr Nadeem Jan said a new variant of Covid-19 "JN.1 Omicron" has been reported in some countries and Pakistan was keeping an eye on developments. "It is a sub-variant of the

Omicron but has not been reported in Pakistan yet. I believe there will be fewer chances that the virus would travel to Pakistan as we are vigilant but there is need to be more careful," he claimed.

"We have increased screening at international border and testing of the people. Moreover, provincial and district governments have been also directed to increase testing."

Meanwhile, the National Institute of Health issued a report claiming that 3,609 tests of Covid-19 were held during last week of which 16 samples were found positive, with no mortality. While the positivity rate was 0.44pc, there were no critical patients of Covid-19.