

Caretaker PM Kakar declares no intention to join politics

Refuses political affiliation amidst resignation of cabinet member Sarfaraz Bugti

By our correspondent

QUETTA: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar unequivocally asserted on Tuesday that he harbors no intentions of aligning himself with any political party post the upcoming general elections slated for February 8, 2024. The statement was made during a press conference in Quetta, addressing inquiries about his potential political trajectory.

Prime Minister Kakar's explicit declaration comes in the wake of Senator Sarfaraz Bugti's resignation from the federal cabinet, who subsequently joined the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Sources indicate that Bugti's decision to step down was driven by a desire to participate in the imminent general elections, as members of the caretaker setup are restricted from contesting polls once the election schedule is issued.

The political landscape remains dynamic as caretaker officials navigate their roles, maintaining impartiality and neutrality in the run-up to the elections. Prime Minister Kakar's commitment to steering clear of political affiliations underscores the caretaker government's dedication to overseeing a fair and transparent electoral process. Kakar addressed crucial issues related to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects and internet services in Balochistan during a recent press conference, providing clarity on the caretaker gov-



ernment's stance.

In terms of CPEC projects, Prime Minister Kakar clarified that the caretaker setup lacks the mandate to initiate new projects. However, he affirmed ongoing efforts to allocate funds specifically for the Quetta-Khuzdar dual carriageway section, expressing optimism about finalizing financial arrangements by the next month. This commitment underscores the caretaker government's dedication to prioritizing and facilitating existing projects within the ambit of its authority.

On the matter of Internet service in Balochistan, Kakar assured the public that the issue would be effectively resolved within a month or two with the completion of the firewall project. The caretaker government aims to address infrastructural challenges and enhance digital connectivity, aligning with broader developmental goals. Moreover, Prime Minister Kakar highlighted the exemption granted to Balochistan from the recent decision to curtail gas supply.

This move reflects the

caretaker government's responsiveness to regional concerns and commitment to ensuring the well-being of the province's residents. As the caretaker government focuses on governance and electoral preparations, Kakar's comprehensive statements signify a commitment to maintaining a non-partisan stance and addressing critical issues that impact the daily lives of the people.

Meanwhile, Anwaarul Haq Kakar, during a comprehensive review meeting on Tuesday, urged the authorities to expedite the rehabilitation process for families affected by the 2022 floods in Balochistan and accelerate the reconstruction of their damaged homes. The prime minister was briefed on the ongoing infrastructure reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the floods. PM Kakar directed relevant authorities to immediately ensure water supply to all deprived areas of the province. Discussions during the meeting covered various sectors, including water reservoirs, house construction, communication infrastructure, law and justice,

fishing, and mining.

Regarding the mining sector, PM Kakar stressed the importance of domestic and foreign investment, highlighting its crucial role in the future of Balochistan's people. He also emphasized the need to improve the transportation system, introducing safety certificates and establishing a database for the issuance and verification of licenses. In context of coastal areas, the prime minister instructed the relevant authorities to establish a special patrolling force to combat illegal trawling. Additionally, he suggested forming a similar force in Gwadar, comprising local people, to address the issue of illegal trawling.

The meeting was attended by Caretaker Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki, Caretaker Federal Information and Broadcasting Minister Murtaza Solangi, Caretaker Federal Education Minister Madad Ali Sindhi, provincial ministers, and senior officers of the provincial administration. While, in a separate meeting with the Zameendar Action Committee of Balochistan, PM Kakar discussed the challenges faced by the agriculture sector, including power loadshedding. The delegation highlighted issues related to electricity supply and irrigation. The prime minister directed the provincial administration to promptly address problems faced by farmers, emphasizing that the welfare of farmers is a priority for the state.

Nawaz Sharif criticizes PTI's 'change' slogan, labels it a 'fraud'

News Desk

LAHORE: Former Prime Minister and PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif, during the 12th meeting of the PML-N's parliamentary board in Lahore on Tuesday, dismissed the PTI's promise of 'change' and 'Naya Pakistan' as a 'fraud.' He asserted that neither he nor his government violated the laws of the land or the constitution.

Nawaz Sharif, reminiscing about Pakistan's state in 2017, claimed that the country was prosperous, bidding farewell to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and successfully repaying foreign loans. Under his leadership, he contended, the PML-N government established a network of motorways and laid the foundation for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Expressing regret over not being allowed to continue in power, Nawaz Sharif asserted that Pakistan would have excelled and become an Asian Tiger if he had been given the opportunity. He maintained that he fulfilled all promises made to the people during his tenure, controlling the US dollar rate for four years and witnessing growth in the country's exports.

Contrasting his government's achievements with the PTI's tenure, Nawaz Sharif highlighted the sharp increase in the dollar rate under the current administration. He emphasized that during his last term as prime minister, loadshedding was eradicated, whereas the routine power outages were addressed by his administration. Nawaz Sharif criticized the PTI for its alleged failure to complete the motorway section between Sukkur and Hyderabad, claiming that if the PML-N had remained in power, the construction would have been completed in 2020 as per their manifesto. He concluded by asserting that if elected again, he would strive to make the country financially self-reliant.

NAB initiates Toshakhana reference against Imran Khan

Accountability Court to scrutinize reference filed by NAB alleging non-disclosure of Toshakhana gifts

By our correspondent



ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) marked a significant development on Tuesday as it submitted a reference to the Accountability Court, implicating Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, in the Toshakhana case.

The reference alleges that during Imran Khan's tenure as prime minister, he failed to disclose pertinent details regarding gifts retained from the Toshakhana. NAB Rawalpindi, the investigating body, has named both Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi as accused parties in the graft reference. Following the submission of the reference, the Registrar Office of the accountability court will conduct a thorough scrutiny of the case before initiating further proceedings. The accountability court has sanctioned a two-day physical remand for Imran Khan in the Toshakhana case. The remand was approved at Adiala Jail, with Accountability Judge Mohammad Bashir presiding over the hearing. Initially, NAB had sought a seven-day physical remand, but the court dismissed the plea, settling for a two-day remand instead.

The Toshakhana matter has taken center stage in national politics following the Election Commission of Pakistan's decision to disqualify Imran Khan. The disqualification stemmed from allegations of making false statements and incorrect declarations regarding gifts from the Toshakhana. The judgment invoked charges of corrupt practices under constitutional sections 167 and 173, leading to Imran Khan's disqualification as per Article

63, 1(P) of the constitution.

It is pertinent to mention that Imran Khan is under legal scrutiny for allegedly failing to declare the accurate value of state gifts in his bank account. The ECP recently ruled that Khan had submitted a false statement and declaration of gifts from the Toshakhana. This decision prompted the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to launch an investigation into the Toshakhana case on March 9, 2023. The NAB's probe has now led to the filing of a reference against Imran Khan, marking a significant development in the legal proceedings surrounding the case. The allegations suggest discrepancies in the declaration of the value of gifts received, raising questions about transparency and accountability.

This development comes at a crucial juncture for Khan and the PTI, as the legal proceedings unfold, and public attention remains focused on the Toshakhana controversy, as a non-bailable warrant has been issued against Imran Khan in connection with the Toshakhana case. This legal tussle revolves around the alleged concealment of details regarding gifts retained from the Toshakhana, a treasury designated for the gifts pre-

scribed to government officials by foreign dignitaries. The case is officially referred to as the Toshakhana reference case. The accusations against the former PM are multi-faceted as alleged to have earned \$36 million by selling three watches presented him as gifts. The crux of the matter lies in his purported failure to disclose certain gifts in his asset declarations, a breach of protocol as per the rules governing Toshakhana.

According to regulations, a sitting prime minister is permitted to retain gifts only after paying a stipulated amount. The Toshakhana case has garnered attention due to the alleged violation of these norms by Imran Khan.

The accusation suggests that he not only failed to deposit some gifts in the treasury but also engaged in the sale of items meant to be retained through official channels. In a recent legal development, the Islamabad High Court temporarily suspended the arrest warrant initially issued by a district and sessions court against Imran Khan. This suspension is effective until March 13, providing a window for legal proceedings and potential clarifications in this intricate case.

Training for Pink bus women drivers begins

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The Sindh Mass Transit Authority (SMTA) has launched a specialized training program for 18 women drivers to skillfully operate modern pink buses, aimed at enhancing inclusivity and gender representation in the transportation sector.

In collaboration with the Motorway Police, the SMTA is conducting the initial phase of the training, which includes practi-



cal instruction on bus driving. Expert instructors from the Peoples Bus Service (PBS), a division of SMTA, are actively involved in providing hands-on training to the aspiring women drivers.

The program's next phase is set to expand its scope by incorporating training for transgender drivers, marking a progressive move toward inclusivity and diversity within the public transportation system.

Upon successful completion of the training regimen, the trained women drivers will be strategically deployed to operate buses for both the Bus Rapid Transit Division (BRTD) and the Peoples Bus Service (PBS).

This initiative not only promotes gender empowerment but also contributes to creating a more inclusive and diverse public transportation landscape in Sindh.

Trader's house robbery conundrum

Public Prosecutor West vindicates DSP Umair, implicates SSP South

By Crime Reporter

KARACHI: In a significant development, the District Public Prosecutor West has exonerated DSP Umair Tariq Bajari in connection with the case involving the robbery of a local trader's house in Orangi Town by the policemen. The prosecutor, after scrutinizing available records, issued a clean chit to DSP Umair Bajari, stating that he was not linked to the incident and found not responsible for any criminal activity.

The investigation report revealed serious revelations about the robbery of 2.5 crores in the local trader's house, pointing to the delayed registration of the case as a critical factor. Notably, the report implicated SSP South Imran Qureshi, outlining the entire raid plan was orchestrated by him, and his car was used in the operation. Imran Qureshi could not be declared acquitted, as per the scrutiny note. Furthermore, the report highlighted that SSP South Imran's statement indicated his order for the raid and the presence of informers during the operation, emphasizing that the need for a comprehensive in-

vestigation into the matter.

Meanwhile, Additional District and Sessions Judge West approved the bail of DSP Umair Bajari, the accused in the case, setting the bail amount at one lac rupees. During the bail hearing, the accused's lawyer argued that the baseless allegations were made against his client, accentuating that the ex-SSP South had been acquitted. Aamir's lawyer asserted that they are ready to face trial, urging the acceptance of the bail. The police had accused DSP Umair of robbing two crore rupees and 70 to 80 tolas of gold from local trader Shakir Khan's house, with the complaint registered at Pirabad Police Station Orangi Town.

In a related development, the Sindh High Court transferred the investigation against DSP Umair Bajari to District South in the case of entering and robbing a trader's house. The court directed the accused to apply for a change in the investigating officer if he has reservations, emphasizing the need for a transparent trial. The public prosecutor suggested transferring the accused to the East district if objections to the West and

South districts persist. The petitioner's lawyer argued for an inquiry with an honest officer, citing information provided by the DIG during the investigation.

It is pertinent to mention that an under-training Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), Umair Tariq Bajari, along with two Shaheen Force officials, has been implicated in the Orangi Town dacoity case in Karachi. The high-level police probe declared DSP Umair Tariq Bajari, along with Khurram and Farman, guilty in the case, leading to their booking along with 20 others. The charges include dacoity and kidnapping, based on the complaint filed by Shakir Khan, the affected individual.

As per the First Information Report (FIR), Shakir Khan, engaged in wholesale business of sanitary items in Orangi Town, detailed the incident. On November 19, approximately 20 individuals, some in police uniform and others in civilian attire, raided his house around 2:20 am. The perpetrators, identified as cops, allegedly took the family members hostage and absconded with Rs20 million, 70 to 80 tola gold, laptops, and mobile phones.

Jamia Binori Issues Fatwa, Calls for Ban on TikTok, Declaring it Haram

KARACHI: Jamia Binori Town has issued a fatwa denouncing the popular video-sharing social media platform "TikTok," advocating for a ban on its usage. The religious decree contends that TikTok's content is being exploited for financial gains and has become a platform for various illicit activities.

The fatwa explicitly states that the TikTok is being misused for sharing prohibited images, videos, and music, promoting indecent content, and disseminating inappropriate humor, including violations of religious and human rights. It further asserts that, from a religious perspective, the use of TikTok is unequivocally considered forbidden and impermissible.

Highlighting concerns about the platform, the fatwa emphasizes that individuals, both young and old, engage in activities to earn money, some of which may conflict with strong moral principles. TikTok, owned by China-based ByteDance, has garnered widespread popularity in Pakistan, with over 39 million downloads reported in 2022 alone, according to data from the mobile and digital analytics firm Sensor Tower.

Electricity tariff hike of Rs4.66 per unit sought

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: In a move that could lead to a further burden on consumers, the Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) has formally submitted an application to the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) on Tuesday. The application seeks NEPRA's approval for an increase of Rs4.66 per unit, signaling a potential rise in electricity tariffs.

According to details, the CPPA on behalf of power distribution companies (DISCOs) has asked NEPRA to approve an increase of Rs4.66 per unit under Fuel Charges Adjustment (FCA) of November, 2023. The hearing in this regard will be conducted on December 27. The NEPRA's approval would increase the financial burden worth Rs40 billion on the power consumers. The CPPA, in its application, has submitted that the total electricity generated with various fuels in February 2023 was recorded at 7.22 billion at a basket price of Rs9.44 per unit.

This latest development, representing a request on behalf of power distribution companies (DISCOs), follows a pattern of tariff adjustments aimed at reflecting

various costs in the power generation process. The impending increase, if approved, may impact consumers' utility bills and add to the financial strain on the power sector. The application further stated that 36.50% of electricity was generated from hydropower sources in November, 13.8% from local coal, 6.44% from imported coal, 9.21% from local gas, 10.57% from imported LNG, and 20.83% from nuclear fuel. Earlier in December, the Federal government had sought Rs 1.72 per unit hike in electricity tariff for the K-electric consumer.

The federal government submitted a request seeking a Rs 1.72 per unit raise in tariff of KE consumers from the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) on account of last year's second and third quarterly tariff adjustments to the power distribution companies. In its request, the federal government broke up the amount stating that the hike has been sought to maintain uniform tariff across the country, meanwhile increase of Rs 0.25 per unit for the January-March 2023 adjustment. Additionally, a Rs 0.47 per unit increase has been requested for the October-December 2022 adjustment.

ECP cites concerns over ex civil servant's political affiliation

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has issued an order for the removal of Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM), Ahad Cheema, from his post, citing concerns over his political associations. The decision was made following a hearing on petitions challenging the political affiliations of federal ministers and advisers.

Ahad Cheema, a former civil servant who served in grade BPS-20 for over 15 years, had also previously served as an adviser to former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on establishment matters. The ECP's verdict comes after notices were issued to Federal Minister for Privatization Fawad Hassan Fawad, Adviser Ahad Cheema, and Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Tauqeer Shah regarding their political associations.

In its order, the Election Commission directed the Secretary Cabinet Division to delist Ahad Cheema as SAPM, highlighting that his past involvement in the former cabinet could potentially impact the fairness of the upcoming elections.

The decision raises questions about the eligibility of individuals with previous political affiliations to hold positions in the caretaker government during the election period. Notably, Ahad Cheema was recently acquitted by an accountability court in a reference related to assets beyond known sources of income.

The ECP's move signals a proactive stance in ensuring a level playing field and impartiality in the electoral process.

Bilawal Bhutto urges burying old politics for progress

By our correspondent

LAHORE: In a compelling address before the Lahore High Court Bar, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), issued a fervent call to action, urging a departure from conventional politics to address and resolve the pressing challenges facing the nation. The former foreign minister emphasized

the need for a fresh and innovative approach, asserting that clinging to traditional political methods would lead the country nowhere.

During his address, Bilawal Bhutto underscored the limitations of conventional politics, stating, "Conventional politics will not take the country anywhere."

He articulated the necessity for a new direction, unburdened

by the constraints of outdated political practices. Commenting on the diverse political aspira-

tions within the country, Bilawal Bhutto observed, "A man wants to become Amir-ul-Momineen, while another intends to run the country with his tiger force." He criticized the divisive and hate-infused politics introduced by the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), asserting that

success should not be measured

by sending someone to jail but considered a political failure.

The PPP leader turned his scrutiny toward the economic policies of the PTI government, highlighting the failure of the subsequent economic team to effectively address issues such as price hikes and inflation.

Bilawal stressed the importance of collective responsibility for the country's development,

urging citizens to contribute their efforts. "This country belongs to all of us, and we have to contribute our share to its development," Bilawal urged, expressing confidence that, with collective determination, the country can overcome its challenges.

He also advised the youth to exercise discernment and avoid falling for deceptive tactics employed by individuals attempting to mislead them.

Gaza ‘most dangerous place in world for a child’: UNICEF

News Desk

UNITED NATIONS: Gaza, which continues to be under deadly Israeli attacks, is by far the most dangerous place in the world for a child and deaths of youngsters from disease will likely surpass those from bombardment in the absence of a ceasefire, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) warned on Tuesday.

"A lack of food, water, shelter and sanitation continues to put children's lives at risk as they suffer under relentless airstrikes with no safe place to go," said UNICEF Spokesperson James Elder, who recently returned from the besieged enclave. Ahead of a UN Security Council meeting on a pause in fighting to facilitate aid access, he told the reporters in Geneva: "Every single child is enduring these 10 weeks of hell and not one of them can escape." "As a parent of a critically sick child told me, 'Our situation is pure misery...I don't know if we will make it through this'," he said.

According to the Gaza health authorities, over 19,400 Palestinians have been killed in the enclave since October 7 when the hostilities between Israel and Hamas erupted. Over 52,000 Palestinians have been injured and their access to life-saving care is extremely limited. UN health

agency WHO said on Tuesday that only eight of the 36 hospitals in the Strip were at least partially functional. Hospitals were overwhelmed with children and their parents, all bearing "the ghastly wounds of war", Elder said. He stressed that while in the Strip he encountered many young amputees. Around 1,000 children in Gaza had lost one or both their legs, he said.

From the UN World Health Organization (WHO), spokesperson Dr Margaret Harris added that WHO staff in Gaza spoke of not even being able to walk in the emergency wards "for fear of stepping on people" lying on the floor "in severe pain" and asking for food and water. She called the situation "unconscionable" and said that it "is beyond belief that the world is allowing this to continue".

Over the past 48 hours, the largest remaining hospital in Gaza, Al Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in the south, was shelled twice, Elder said. That hospital "not only shelters large numbers of children who had already been badly injured in attacks on their homes, but hundreds of women and children seeking safety", he stressed, referring to those who have had to flee because of the hostilities and evacuation orders. Some 1.9 million people, or the vast majority of the enclave's population, are

estimated to be displaced in Gaza.

Injured children dealing with the loss of loved ones had been forced to move again and again, Mr Elder said. "Where do children and their families go? They are not safe in hospitals. They are not safe in shelters. And they are certainly not safe in the so-called 'safe' zones," he insisted. The UNICEF spokesperson said that the "safe zones" were "anything but safe" because they had been designated unilaterally by Israel alone and lacked "sufficient resources for survival": food, water, medicine, protection.

Elder described the zones as "tiny patches of barren land, or street corners, or half-built buildings, with no water, no facilities, no shelter from the cold and the rain and no sanitation". "Under the current besieged conditions, adequate supplies for such zones are impossible," he said, adding that during his recent stay in Gaza he had experienced that reality first-hand. The UNICEF spokesperson highlighted the dire lack of adequate sanitation, pointing out that in Gaza there was one toilet for 700 people on average. Diarrhoea cases in children were above 100,000 and combined with soaring malnutrition could prove increasingly deadly, he said.

Elder added that more than 130,000 of children

under two were not receiving "critical life-saving breast-feeding and age-appropriate complementary feeding" such as micronutrient supplementation.

The delivery of aid was a "matter of life or death" for children in Gaza, and the conditions to provide that aid "are not being met", Elder said. The number of aid trucks allowed into Gaza remains "well below the daily average of 500 truckloads" that entered every working day prior to October 7, according to the UN humanitarian affairs coordination office, OCHA.

On Sunday, OCHA said that 102 trucks carrying humanitarian supplies and four tankers of fuel entered Gaza through the Rafah crossing from Egypt and 79 trucks entered through the Kerem Shalom crossing from Israel, for the first time since the start of the escalation. WHO's Dr Harris stressed that beyond bringing in supplies across the border into the enclave, it was a challenge to get aid to where it's needed, because of the ongoing hostilities but also the massive damage to roads. "An immediate and long-lasting humanitarian ceasefire is the only way to end the killing and injuring of children, and child deaths from disease, and enable the urgent delivery of desperately needed life-saving aid," Elder said.



GAZA: A heartbroken mother carries her child out from the debris of her house, while other people were trying to find out their loved ones under the rubbles, here on Tuesday.

Police crackdown unleashes intense encounter with dacoits

By our correspondent

DADU: A four-hour long crackdown against a notorious dacoit gang in the limit local police station has escalated into a fierce encounter between the law enforcement and criminals. Led by SSP Shabir Sethar, the operation aims to dismantle the criminal network responsible for a spate of robberies and other heinous crimes.

The crackdown, part of a broader strategy to curb criminal activities, has unleashed ongoing gunfire as police face off against the dacoit group. SSP Shabir Sethar is actively overseeing the operation, emphasizing the commitment to restoring peace and order. The dacoits hastily abandoned two hideouts and fronts. Law enforcement, in a significant development, recovered two hand grenades and an array of weapons from the crime scene, intensifying the operation against the criminal syndicate.

The operation has led to the apprehension of three additional suspects, bringing the total number of arrested individuals to 15. The police confirmed the arrests, signaling a significant stride in dismantling the dacoit operation. Responding to the escalating situation, additional police forces, armored vehicles, and commandos have been called to the scene. This move underscores the gravity of the operation and the authorities' unwavering commitment to maintaining law and order in the region. SSP Shabir Sithar continues to provide real-time updates on the unfolding encounter, highlighting the dynamic nature of the operation against the dacoit network in Dadu.

Gas cylinder blast kills two at Dadu bus stop

By our correspondent

DADU: Two people succumbed to injuries sustained in a gas cylinder explosion at a bus stop in Dadu on Tuesday.

The victims, identified as Mukhtiar Jamali and Hanif Qambrani, were undergoing treatment at a local hospital in Karachi, where they tragically lost their lives. Noor Nabi Jamali, the third injured party, has taken legal action against the Deputy Commissioner, SSP, and the shop owner, alleging negligence and lack of prompt action in response to the incident. The grieving families are seeking justice and accountability for the loss of their loved ones.

Pakistan announces T20 squad for NZ series

News Desk

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has unveiled the squad for the upcoming T20 series against New Zealand, slated for January 2024. Pacer Shaheen Afridi will lead the T20I side for the first time, taking over the captaincy from Babar Azam. The 17-member squad includes exciting youngsters like Abbas Afridi, Saim Ayub, Haseebullah Khan, and Sahibzada Farhan. Destructive batter Azam Khan makes a return to the squad, joining the ranks of experienced players like Fakhar Zaman, Babar Azam, and Mohammad Rizwan.

The Pakistan cricket team, currently in Australia for a three-match Test series in the World Test Championship 2023-25 cycle, will conclude its tour on January 7. Shaheen Afridi, recognized as one of the world's premier bowlers, particularly with the new ball, will embark on his captaincy journey against the 2021 T20 World Cup runners-up. During the squad announcement,

Wahab Riaz addressed the inclusion of players like Haseebullah, stating, "Haseebullah played some impactful innings in the PSL in the middle-order and has performed a lot in white-ball cricket. He opens in domestic cricket, but for team adjustment, we need to develop players for numbers 4-7."

Riaz highlighted the team's building phase, emphasizing the exploration of players for specific batting positions. The exclusion of players like Khushdil Shah, Asif Ali, Haider Ali, Shoaib Malik, and Faheem Ashraf was mentioned as part of the ongoing assessment of players for crucial middle-order roles. Regarding the absence of wicketkeeper Mohammad Haris and the injury to all-rounder Shadab Khan, Riaz explained, "We have rested Mohammad Haris for this series."

There were some domestic performers in First Class cricket who we wanted to give a chance and increase our pool of players, so we rested Haris from this tour." He added, "Shadab

Khan is a very important member of Pakistan T20 cricket. Unfortunately, he suffered an ankle injury [during the National T20] and requires two further weeks of rehab. After that, he'll be available to bowl."

T20 Squad: Shaheen Afridi (c), Aamir Jamal, Abbas Afridi, Abrar Ahmed, Azam Khan (wk), Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Haseebullah (wk), Iftikhar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Mojam-mad Wasim Jnr, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Usama Mir, Zaman Khan.

Schedule of Pakistan's 2024 tour to New Zealand: * First match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 12 January, Auckland * Second match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 14 January, Hamilton * Third match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 17 January, Dunedin * Fourth match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 19 January, Christchurch * Fifth match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 21 January, Christchurch.

UAE introduces PR visas in RAKEZ

RAKEZ takes bold step to attract global talent and promote long-term residency

DUBAI: In a strategic move aimed at positioning the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah as a global hub for talent, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has introduced an unprecedented initiative - affordable permanent residency visas. This transformative opportunity, revealed by the Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ), is set to reshape the landscape of residency options in the region.

Key Features of the AED16,500 Annual Visa Package:

- UAE Residence Visa
- Third-Party Visa Processing
- Comprehensive Medical Tests
- Emirates ID Card
- Pre-Approval for Business License
- Access to a Shared Workstation

The AED16,500 package offers an extensive array of benefits, making Ras Al Khaimah an attractive destination for those seeking secure and advantageous residency status. Unlike many residency programs, this package covers all associated fees, eliminating hidden

or additional costs and reflecting Ras Al Khaimah's commitment to transparency. A standout feature of the permanent residency visa is its inclusivity, allowing visa holders to effortlessly sponsor their family members for relocation to the UAE. This family-centric approach aims to make the transition to life in the emirate seamless and enriching for individuals and their loved ones.

Individuals eager to seize this unique opportunity can submit their applications directly through the RAKEZ website. The straightforward application process adds to the appeal of this initiative, making it easier for potential residents to navigate the pathway to obtaining permanent residency in the UAE. While RAKEZ has outlined the cost and benefits of the permanent residency visa, potential applicants remain in suspense regarding the duration of this opportunity. As aspirants prepare to embark on this transformative journey, many are keenly awaiting further details about the timeframe within which they can avail themselves of this unparalleled chance.

Suspects in journalist's murder case apprehended

By our correspondents

SUKKUR: The police successfully apprehended two close associates of the main suspect involved in the tragic killing of journalist Jan Muhammad Mahar. SSP Sukkur Irfan Ali Samo confirmed the arrests, stating that the targeted operations were conducted in various areas within Shah Bello's riverine areas to apprehend the perpetrators responsible for the journalist's murder.

SSP Samo also revealed that despite the ongoing efforts to capture the main accused, Sheero Mahar, two close associates, including Sheero Mehr's nephew, Ismail, have been taken into custody. The police continuously conducted operations in the riverine areas of Shah Bello in Sukkur, where a police camp has also been established to monitor the entire region. The camp would serve as a base for around-the-clock actions against the alleged criminals.

A substantial police contingent, equipped with armored vehicles, is leading the operations against the individuals involved in the killing of Journalist Jan Muhammad Mahar. SSP Samo assured that the police's actions against the accused have been intensified, expressing confidence in the imminent capture of the main suspect.

In a separate incident, the Incharge of Crime Investigation Agency Khairpur, Inspector Mir Imdad Talpur, along with the station house officer of A-Section Police Khairpur, Rafiq Pathan, successfully recovered a stolen GLI car from Shikarpur. The car, lifted two months earlier from Saida Goth Khairpur, was returned to its owner, Mehran Khan Goraya, following the swift and effective actions of the law enforcement authorities.

SHRC advocates for democratic culture in upcoming polls

By our correspondent

SUKKUR: In a proactive move to strengthen the democratic process and safeguard human rights during the upcoming general elections in 2024, the Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC) convened a meeting with the Regional Election Commissioner Sukkur.

Affirming its unwavering commitment to upholding human rights in the province, the SHRC functions in strict adherence to both national and international laws. The Commission actively addresses complaints, petitions, and initiates Suo-Motu actions to tackle a diverse range of human rights concerns. Having played a pivotal role in addressing pressing issues in Sindh, such as advocating for transgender rights during CNIC issuance, seeking justice for the murders of journalists, and addressing minority issues in Ghotki and various districts, the SHRC has consistently championed human rights causes.

Iqbal Ahmed Detho, Chairperson of the SHRC, emphasized the imperative for fair and transparent general elections in 2024. He urged the Provincial Election Commissioner, Sindh, to consider pivotal issues in the electoral process. Detho highlighted that democracy extends beyond the act of casting votes, emphasizing informed choices and accountability through periodic elections. Syed Waseem Ahmed Jaffer, Regional Election Commissioner of the Sukkur Region, assured the SHRC that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has initiated steps and will continue to address issues to ensure free and fair elections in Sindh.

ECP reserves verdict on PTI's intra-party polls

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: As the February 8 general elections approach, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has reserved its verdict on the matter of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) intra-party elections. The five-member bench, headed by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, conducted the hearing on Tuesday, addressing concerns raised over the alleged irregularities in the polls held on December 2.

The ECP had earlier taken notice of the intra-party polls, declaring them "not transparent" and ordering fresh elections within 20 days or facing the risk of losing the party's electoral symbol, the "bat."

Gen Asim Munir, CENTOM chief Kurilla hold talks on regional security

Both sides reiterated need for enhancing training interactions between CENTCOM and Pakistan Army, says ISPR

WASHINGTON: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir, who is on an official visit to the US, visited Headquarters Central Command at Tampa Bay in Florida, and held a meeting with CENTCOM Commander General Michael Erik Kurilla, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the military's media wing said matters of shared interests, particularly cooperation in regional security matters, came under discussion. "Both sides discussed avenues of joint training and reiterated the need for enhancing training interactions between CENTCOM and Pakistan Army," the ISPR said. Gen Munir also visited the CENTCOM Joint Operations Center. Gen Munir landed in the US last week on his maiden official visit to the country since assuming office in November last year.

Earlier, the army chief held meetings with top US



WASHINGTON: Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir meeting with CENTCOM Commander General Michael Erik Kurilla at the Headquarters Central Command at Tampa Bay in Florida, here on Tuesday.

officials including Secretary of State Antony J Blinken, Secretary of Defence General (ret'd) Lloyd J Austin, Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, Deputy National Security Adviser Jonathan Finer and Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff General Charles Q Brown during the visit. In the meetings, Pakistan and the US agreed to enhance cooperation on matters related to counter-terrorism and defence collaboration, according to ISPR's statement.

Responding to a question related to General Munir's ongoing visit to the US, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said Monday that the army chief met a number of senior officials at the State Department and Pentagon. "Pakistan is a major non-NATO ally of the United States and a NATO partner. We look forward to partnering with them on regional security and defence cooperation," he added.

‘Dump-and-Run’ strategy grips PSX as KSE-100 plummets over 2,300 points

News Desk

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a significant downturn as the benchmark KSE-100 Index nosedived by over 2,300 points, slipping below the historic 65,000 level. The market experienced a "dump-and-run" scenario, with investors adopting a profit-taking approach in the absence of positive triggers. The benchmark KSE-100 index closed at 62,833.03 points after losing 2,371.64 points or 3.64%.

Analysts attributed the bearish trend to year-end profit-taking and a lack of positive macroeconomic factors. Samiullah Tariq, Head of Research at Pakistan-Kuwait, noted that bears dominated trading at the bourse, leading to a year-end correction. Raza Jafri,

Head of Equities at Intermarket Securities, highlighted the market's nervousness ahead of the February 8 elections, stating that the KSE-100 had shed 5% during the week, reflecting pre-election rally fatigue.

Despite a brief recovery during the session, the market closed in negative territory. Overall trading volumes decreased to 1.51 billion shares, with a total value of Rs29.09 billion. Among the traded companies, 31 stocks closed higher, 351 fell, and 4 remained unchanged. K-Electric Ltd emerged as the volume leader, trading 341.06 million shares, followed by WorldCall Telecom and Energycio PK. The market's uncertainty and leveraged positions potentially triggering margin calls contributed to the week's downturn, reflecting a cautious sentiment among investors.

Dialogue held highlighting urgency of Sindh water policy

By our correspondent

SUKKUR: The National Advocacy for Rights of Innocent (NARI) Foundation Sukkur, Indus Consortium, and Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority (SIDA), in partnership with Oxfam Pakistan, organized a District-Level Policy Dialogue on the Sindh Water Policy and its intersection with Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change in Sukkur. The event brought together experts, key stake-

holders, and government officials to underscore the pressing need for immediate steps to implement the Sindh Water Policy.

During the dialogue, local experts emphasized the urgency of incorporating the Sindh Water Policy and ensuring swift measures for implementing the recommendations of the local community. The event witnessed the participation of government officials, including representatives from Sindh Irrigation and

Drainage Authority (SIDA), Sindh Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Women Agriculture Workers Council, Social Welfare Department, academic institutions, water user associations, small farmers, local growers, representatives of civil society organizations, water experts, and media representatives.

Addressing the audience, experts, including Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Rasool Bux Mahar, Chairperson Sindh Human

Rights Commission Iqbal Ahmed Detho, and representatives from NARI Foundation, emphasized the water-related challenges faced by the people of Sukkur. They stressed the importance of creating awareness, engaging local communities, and incorporating grassroots perspectives in shaping water policy, DRR, and Climate Change strategies in Sindh.

Highlighting the strains on freshwater sources due to climate change, popula-

tion growth, urbanization, and industrialization, experts emphasized the need for effective water management and governance. Shah Nawaz Umarani, an Institutional Specialist at SIDA, emphasized the multifaceted and complex challenges related to water availability, distribution, and quality. He called for a water policy that establishes a harmonious balance between human needs, environmental preservation, and economic development.

Umarani urged individuals to adopt responsible water practices in their daily lives, support policies protecting water resources, and raise awareness about the importance of water conservation. The event also featured a documentary on water issues, challenges, community contributions, and initiatives by the NARI Foundation and Indus Consortium, fostering a robust dialogue on water policy challenges and opportunities.

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Price hikes: Navigating the rollercoaster of inflation

Annual inflation rate in Pakistan, based on the CPI, was 29.2% in Nov 2023

Pakistan is burdened with a long list of troubles, a Taliban insurgency, poverty, corruption and power cuts are just a few. In these consequences where country is going through a lot, Inflation is becoming one of the most potentially explosive problems and it has emerged to be the main economic challenge for Pakistan as it harms growth and reduces the purchasing power of people. According to the latest data from the World Bank, the annual inflation rate in Pakistan, based on the CPI, was 29.2% in November 2023, the highest in the world. This means that the average cost of a basket of goods and services that consumers buy was 29.2% higher in November 2023 than in November 2022. This was primarily fueled by a sharp rise in housing & utilities costs, which soared to 33% from 20.5% in October.

Being a developing country, inflation has been an endless challenge to Pakistan, impacting the cost of living for both individuals and families. The hike in prices of living essentials including food, petroleum products and electricity has made the lives of people miserable, specifically the ones who are sole breadwinners for their families. While speaking to Samaa a local businessman Ahmed said, “We are losing big profits in our businesses due to rising prices. I wish the government officials would help us but they are busy stuffing their pockets with the country’s money.” The escalating prices of food items, particularly fresh fruits, milk, and chicken is having a major impact on the livelihoods of all the sectors of society, but much of the burden of this falls on the poor community.

Notable point here is that this problem needs to be addressed as it decreases the welfare of poor people, particularly in the condition where no relief is being provided to them. The daily wage workers wait on the roadside in search of work for long hours, shockingly many wait for days hoping to pick up some labor, and when an employer comes along, there is fierce competition for the day’s wage between them. Around 95 million people in the society exist somewhere below the poverty line and millions are even struggling to get nutritious food. A daily wage earner Zaheer said, “We wait for hours and sometimes days to earn money so we can fulfill the basic desires of our children”.

Inflation is the talk of the town these days and surprisingly some other major aspects contribute to the price hikes in Pakistan, for instance natural disasters comprising floods, earthquakes, and locust attacks destroy the production of the agriculture sector. On the other hand our country has a large and mounting population, with high demands of goods and services and the supply of these products and services is often insufficient to meet the demands of society due to low productivity, inadequate infrastructure, and weak governance. While speaking to DW the Head of Edhi Foundation, Faisal Edhi said, “The number of people needing aid has increased, the condition in which people are living especially the working class is not as it has been before. They used to spend 50% of their income on food but now they have to spend 70-80% of their income on food”.

Price rises has become a politically-charged issue and the shocking element is that the government is unwilling to tackle the problem. Unexpectedly, it is not just ordinary Pakistanis who are frustrated but Pakistan’s economic lifeline, The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is losing patience with what it sees as an inflexible political leadership. The country has been politically unstable for many years because no government till the date has completed the tenure of five years, furthermore, there is a lack of leadership in the nation due to which the matter of inflation is uncontrollable now.

“We can’t make money anymore because prices have been high for so long, said Farooq, sitting beside other idle merchants. It is making it harder to afford necessities and the scenario is something that needs attention”.

“I am the sole bread-earner of the family of 7, including my old parents, and I don’t know how long we can survive when prices are increasing daily,” said a rickshaw driver Saleem”. Pakistanis have been hit with an average inflation rate of 15 percent over the past three fiscal years and economists say irresponsible government policies are likely to keep it high. The chicken was once a common thing for everyone to buy but now it is also considered as a luxury item that not every individual can afford.

A huge sum of people in society are food insecure which means they are not getting good meals every day, they do not have shelters and sadly they do not have enough funds to meet the expenses of basic medical expenditures.

The current rate of inflation in the country is pushing many into poverty and Pakistan is going through the worst economic crisis seen in years. Analyzing these circumstances any unpredictable increase in the rates of basic requirements of life can make a layman change his perspectives and political views.

Stating actuality, Inflation is beneficial only for inflators, the political parties are fighting for their own interests and gains and in this chaos, and they have forgotten that the local community is going through the vilest circumstances, the innocent ones are dying of hunger. Despite this all, Pakistan is trapped in a cycle of borrowing that appears to have no end because we as a country are IMF addict and the fault lies within our roots.

Trapped in a tube station on my way to march for a ceasefire in Gaza, I found hope in solidarity

BY LYNNE SEGAL

Recalling reasons for hope at the close of a year in which we have witnessed such devastation is challenging. Yet, like others before me, I know it’s surely necessary to look for ways of making hope possible and resisting despair. But it’s complicated, teasing apart moments of hope from feelings of desolation in violent times.

We all recall the barbaric violence of 7 October, when Hamas kidnapped hundreds of civilians and brutally massacred 1,200 people in southern Israel. This resulted in Israel’s immediate declaration of war on Hamas and unparalleled bombing ever since (with a few days’ pause). So far, there are up to 21,000 Palestinians dead, hundreds of thousands injured and 2 million displaced and destitute, more than half of them children.

I hardly expected to find reasons for hope when I set out on 11 November, as I had most Saturdays over the previous month, to join others calling for a ceasefire and the return of hostages. However, this Armistice Day, as thousands headed at the same time for Hyde Park corner in London, to join the start of the march, many of us

became trapped underground at Marble Arch station.

There we were, at a standstill, young and old together, strangers to each other, including women in headscarves, children with their Palestinian flags and Jews organising for peace, all held tight with little room. No frustration, anger or impatience arose, as distances collapsed across age, ethnicity, and religious difference. Instead, there was a sense that nothing bad could happen since we were all together. Being stuck peacefully side by side in the underground was the most hopeful evidence that our goal was possible. Since I am now old and often breathless, I would have found it hard to remain in that situation without the kindness and concern evident on every face. Reluctant as I am to leave home nowadays, I would never have got there at all except for friends happy to accompany me.

Wearing my Jewish Voice for Labour badge, I was in search of the Jewish group, which had grown larger each week. Apart from our desire to end the stupefying violence engulfing Gaza, now reaching genocidal proportions, our goal was to be seen and counted alongside our Muslim and other marching partners. The ensuing unexpected crush was indeed a hopeful moment – heading, as we were, not to a “hate march” but a care march. We were intent not just to insist on peace on Armistice Day, but to demand an end to one of the longest, most coercive injustices in history. Solidarity was our goal, despite false accusations of violent intent from our then home secretary, Suella Braverman, thankfully now gone. Unsurprisingly, the only trouble that day came from our opponents, hoping to stop our peaceful protests through violence.

My Armistice Day experience was not only a powerful source of hope in tragic times, helping to keep despair at bay, but it reminded me of similar past occurrences in the seemingly hopeless struggle for peace and justice between Israel and the Palestinians. Visiting Israel for peace conferences, I had, like many others I know, always felt a fleeting hope in the presence of the late Dr Eyad el-Sarraj, the charismatic Palestinian psychiatrist who founded the Gaza Community Mental Health Program in 1990.

It was amazing how Eyad could always grasp at the tiniest thread of hope, insisting the Israelis and Palestinians needed each other: “For only the Palestinians can release Israel from its moral guilt, from all that

has gone wrong since those first Zionist dreams to the nightmare of living in a country permanently at war with its neighbors; while only the Israelis can negotiate a just peace with Palestine, allowing them control over their own affairs and thereby laying the basis for security, freedom and dignity for both sides.” He struggled at home trying to prevent imprisoned Gazans from resorting to violence, then travelled the world demanding an end to the Israel’s siege and occupation as often as he could.

I also sometimes felt a similar hope listening to the eloquent words of Raja Shehadeh from the West Bank, who’s always known that peace is possible, despite the unending military manoeuvres of a hardline Israeli state determined to prevent it. The catastrophic destruction in Gaza and heightened violence in the West Bank has all but extinguished any voices of hope, with so many Palestinians struggling against impossible odds just to survive. So, at this moment, the only hope I can find is in experiencing solidarity on the streets with hundreds of thousands of others calling for an end to violence.

(Lynne Segal is anniversary professor emerita of psychosocial studies at Birkbeck, University of London)

Three hostages killed by mistake: Netanyahu’s shoot-first policies are harming all of us

BY DAHLIA SCHEINDLIN

KARACHI: From 7 October onward, Israelis have clung to the one hope that unified this normally fractious and now broken society: freeing the hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. The faces of those stolen people haunt us on every street. Hope soared when nearly half of the hostages were released in a temporary ceasefire deal last month, and Israelis took to the streets demanding more.

Then on Friday, three hostages who had survived 70 days in violent, wartime captivity in Gaza somehow got loose, only for Israeli forces to mistake them as a threat – and shoot them dead.

They were shirtless and holding a white flag. Collective misery flowed. Demonstrators stalked the streets of Tel Aviv at midnight, clamouring for a new hostage-release deal, and thousands poured out on Saturday evening, shouting the clipped, almost primal cry, “Now!”

But Israel’s government is hardly rushing to cut another such deal. The first one forced painful concessions: Israel released hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, which encourages further hostage-taking; such deals can include dangerous prisoners, and the whole situation left some Israeli families elated as their loved ones re-

turned, while others remain in agony. But if last month Israel faced a terrible double-bind between hostage release and its consequences, the incident on Friday symbolised something else: not a wrenching choice, but the inevitability of the worst possible outcomes.

Netanyahu’s press conferences are an increasingly grotesque spectacle these days, given his apparent lack of remorse or sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, he got one thing right on Saturday evening: since the tragedy, he said, he could not stop turning over the tiny hypotheticals that could have saved the hostages’ lives. I, too, had spent Saturday with frantic thoughts, such as imagining a split-second question that soldiers can shout when in doubt, that only Israelis would know how to answer – some trivia about local pop culture, or a nickname of a minister. This is what the situation has reduced us to – citizens casting about for tricks when neither the government nor the army can protect us.

One must also consider the battlefield where the hostages were killed: Israeli media has reported on claims by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) that Hamas has laid traps with dolls disguised as babies, with hidden speakers playing crying sounds or pleading in Hebrew, to draw

soldiers towards an ambush.

Mourners at the funeral of Alon Shamriz, who was mistakenly killed by the IDF last Friday, at Shefayim kibbutz, Israel, on 17 December 2023.

Mourners at the funeral of Alon Shamriz, who was mistakenly killed by the IDF last Friday, at Shefayim kibbutz, Israel, on 17 December 2023. Photograph: Oren Ziv/AFP/Getty Images

The IDF chief of staff has sternly admonished soldiers since Friday that, according to the rules of engagement, shirtless people surrendering with white flags, like the hostages (who also called in Hebrew to be saved), should not be killed. But it’s also true that Israeli soldiers have been shooting Palestinians for years with little or no punishment – whether it’s an autistic man in East Jerusalem or an incapacitated Palestinian attacker already immobilised on the ground.

Just two weeks ago, a Jewish Israeli who intervened in a terror attack in Jerusalem was shot dead by IDF soldiers. The one-way road to Friday’s nightmare was paved by the de facto indulgence of shoot-first policies.

The idea that these unacceptable practices would be targeted only at Palestinians – as if the two populations are not joined at the heart of this mess – is a lie.

Of course, it was Hamas that lured Israel into the current trap of this filthy war. Blinded by pain, rage and humiliation, Israel only followed one path: overwhelming force.

If there were other options, like the targeted, restrained response that Thomas Friedman advocated in the early weeks of the war, Israel’s leaders didn’t seem to consider them.

The outcome is incomprehensible death, misery and destruction in Gaza, mistakes, like shooting the hostages, that can that can never be undone.

What of the future? A few weeks into the war, analysts and pundits like me scrambled to imagine “day after” plans to make things better, for Palestinians and for Israelis – for the long term, too. Many ideas have been floated, but Netanyahu quickly rejected most of them. He won’t allow Hamas to remain in power, and who can argue with that? He won’t allow Fatah, because “Hamastan” and “Fatahstan” are just the same, he insists, as if infantile campaign slogans can solve this horror.

There will be no international presence, no other party involved in overseeing security. No Palestinian state. Israel’s leadership is not choosing between paths – it has only one road: a long war followed by Israeli security control and no

Palestinian political leadership in Gaza. The result will be governance by gangs: Mogadishu on the Mediterranean.

Hamas holds a special place in the history of horrible leaders. In the blood-soaked story of this conflict, the abuse it has wreaked on its own people has neither precedent nor excuse. Palestinians may well conclude, as Hussein Ibish at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington has argued, that they should never forgive Hamas.

All the alternatives have been slammed shut. And as an Israeli analyst, I’m always being asked for answers – but I have none.

It’s not for lack of trying and not for lack of ideas; my devoted peace-oriented Israeli and Palestinian colleagues in civil society, journalism and academia, as well as street and field activists, and even those in politics, have been racking our brains for decades. But for 15 years or so, nobody in power wants to hear them. For now, I think of those three hostages in Gaza who hung tattered sheets out of the window of the building they were in, stained with food to form the words “SOS”. Maybe, eventually, someone will listen.

(Dahlia Scheindlin is a political analyst in Tel Aviv, and the author of The Crooked Timber of Democracy in Israel)

Deeply unequal

The summit of Mount Everest, in case you haven’t heard, has become somewhat of a trash heap, a high-profile embarrassment that some have taken to calling the “world’s highest garbage dump.”

A half-century ago, few would have expected this outcome. Back in 1976, Nepal, the Himalayan nation that counts Everest – Mount Sagarmatha – as its most glorious natural treasure, had created a national park to protect Everest and its fellow peaks. Three years later, UNESCO named Everest an official world heritage site. Nobody worried about Everest becoming a garbage dump.

But then, in the early 1980s, things started changing. Over the past four decades, as a new Statistica analysis points out, scaling Everest has become “a lucrative business”.

Between 1953, the year the climbers Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay first conquered Everest, and the late 1970s, no more than small handfuls of adventurous souls annually made the demanding trek to the Earth’s highest summit.

Since those late 1970s, the annual conqueror total has exploded, to well over 800 in the year before the Covid pandemic hit.

What has also exploded in the years since the early 1980s: the world’s population of deep pockets. That explosion has clearly impacted the traffic on Mount Everest. We now have oodles of thrill seekers who can handily afford all the bells and whistles less-than-world-class climbers need to make a climb up Everest.

The combined cost of these bells and whistles, an analysis earlier this fall calculated, can reach anywhere up to \$160,000 for a single ascent.

In today’s deeply unequal world we abound with people who can afford that sort of expense. The latest available data place the global population of “ultra high net worth individuals” – those fortunes worth at least \$30 million – at nearly 400,000. These super rich can essentially afford to seek out any turn-on.

And the rest of us, defenders of these deep pockets claim, should be eternally grateful for all the spending this seeking demands.

The outlays the rich make for adventure and pleasure, the argument goes, create jobs and keep our global economy humming.

In the Himalayas, for instance, an American affluent can engage the services of a local climbing Sherpa guide for a mere \$5,000. Other Sherpa locals can make \$2,000 plus tips for doing the cooking for a climbing expedition. These sorts of fees can make life-changing differences for families who live on the mountainsides around Everest.

But fees like these barely make a dent in Nepal’s overall poverty.

In Nepal today, Oxfam points out, half of all children under age five suffer from malnutrition. Nearly as many Nepalese, 44 percent, live below the poverty line.

Nepalese above and below that line also have to deal with the environmental damage the small armies of affluent mountain climbers leave behind.

Climbers on Everest, notes National Geographic, spend weeks making their ascents, leaving the mountain’s slopes “littered with discarded empty oxygen canisters, abandoned tents, food containers, and even human feces.” That litter has contaminated the local watershed.

But the show must go on – for the awesomely affluent. And remember, shills for our deepest pockets never tire of reminding us, those affluents are creating jobs! And they unquestionably are. On Everest and around the world, the rich are creating lines of work we never imagined existed.

“High-net-worth wine enthusiasts,” journalist Cindy Lamothe observed last week, “often employ experts to curate and manage their wine collections.” These specialists both “select rare and valuable bottles” and “also ensure proper storage, rotation and auctioning when the time is right, creating a seamless wine investment strategy.”

Wealthy art collectors employ specialized art ‘authenticators’ who use forensic analysis and all sorts of other techniques to confirm an artwork’s authenticity, a must in ‘a market filled with forgeries’.

Without the wealthy among us, we’d also have to do without ‘private medical concierge services’, a line of work that

connects wealthy clients ‘with top-tier doctors and specialists, offering speedy appointments, and even providing round-the-clock access for consultations’.

Jobs, jobs, jobs – and only the presence of an enormously wealthy few can ensure these jobs continue to be available!

In other times, in other places, the numbers of those employed directly by the wealthy have sometimes reached significantly high levels. In the early 20th century, an astounding 1.5 million British people worked as butlers, maids, and other domestics for the UK’s rich.

Our contemporary rich seem intent on recreating that Edwardian world – appropriately updated for high-end 21st century sensibilities.

Our deepest modern-day pockets, explains a recent Washington Post analysis, “are pursuing the optimization of everyday life, supported by entourage of experts – often managed by a single power assistant – who help the hyper-successful live longer, do more and pursue a fleeting and intangible perfection in every aspect of their existence.”

The bigger the mansion today, the greater the need for the “new domestics,” the personal lifestyle experts who keep the “right furnishings” in the lounges and the “right cars” in the garages. Lush home theaters demand projectionists. Estates in Malibu even have “personal hospitality directors” who help house guests plan their daily activities.

Our contemporary societies do not, of course, have to revolve around the needs of the richest among us. Instead of watching the wealthy trek up Everest, for instance, we could be watching kids from average families having a blast trekking up climbing walls in community gyms.

But public services that imaginative will only materialize if we show some serious political imagination, if we dare to pursue tax and other policy changes that keep income and wealth from concentrating in a precious few pockets.

The rest of us don’t have to serve the rich. We can work to create societies that take a serious shot at serving us all.

Google Settles Antitrust Lawsuit with \$700 Million Payment

Google parent company Alphabet has agreed to pay \$700 million as part of an antitrust settlement, according to an announcement made public on Monday. The funds will be allocated to US customers of Google’s Android app store and state governments.

The antitrust settlement stems from a lawsuit filed in July 2021, where dozens of US states accused Google of abusing its power in consumer access to apps on mobile devices using the Android operating system. The settlement includes modifications to Google Play, the company’s app store, aimed at reducing competition barriers for developers.

As part of the settlement, Google will implement changes, allowing apps to bill users directly and introducing an alternative billing option alongside Google Play’s billing system for in-app purchases.

The move aims to address accusations of anti-competitive tactics, particularly discouraging Android apps from being distributed outside of Google’s Play store, where commissions are collected on transactions.

The settlement, initially announced in September, was made public with details disclosed on Monday. Google will contribute \$630 million to a settlement fund benefiting consumers, and an additional \$70 million to a fund used by states. Eligible consumers who made purchases on the Play store between August 16, 2016, and September 30, 2023, will receive a minimum of \$2.

While the settlement received widespread participation from US states and territories, Epic Games CEO Tim Sweeney criticized the agreement, calling it “an injustice to all Android users and developers.”

Epic Games had previously won a related lawsuit against Google regarding its Android app store. Sweeney expressed discontent with the settlement, arguing that it allows for “scare screens” dissuading users from alternatives to Google Play.

Epic Games also pointed out that users choosing a different payment option on their device would still incur a 26% commission fee to Google, lower than the typical 30% charged on Play.

Alphabet indicated that they are challenging the verdict with Epic Games, emphasizing that their case is far from over.



Repatriation Continues: Over 438,000 Illegal Afghans Return to Homeland

ISLAMABAD: In a continuing effort to ensure the dignified and secure repatriation of illegal foreign nationals, particularly Afghan citizens, a noteworthy milestone was achieved on Monday with 1586 Afghan nationals voluntarily returning to their home country. This brings the cumulative number of repatriated immigrants to an impressive 438,376.

This concerted initiative follows the directives set by the apex committee of the National Action Plan (NAP) during a meeting chaired by Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar on October 3. The committee, in setting a deadline for all foreign nationals residing illegally in Pakistan, urged them to leave voluntarily by October 31 or face deportation. Actively facilitating the repatriation process, the Pakistani government has focused on border points such as Torkham and Chaman, mainly catering to the Afghan population. Caretaker Interior Minister Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti, during a Senate address, emphasized the gov-

ernment's commitment to a humane approach in the repatriation efforts.

"Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar has given very clear instructions that there should be no manhandling of illegal immigrants during the repatriation process," assured Minister Bugti. He reiterated that any mismanagement at the borders would be promptly addressed, and welcomed suggestions from political leadership regarding the process. Minister Bugti emphatically stated that Afghan refugees possessing legal documents have not faced mistreatment during the repatriation efforts, highlighting the commitment to ensuring a respectful and orderly return for those residing illegally in the country.

In recent security assessments, heightened concerns have emerged regarding the involvement of Afghan nationals, particularly illegal immigrants residing in Pakistan, in criminal and terrorist activities. Security agencies are intensifying efforts to address this growing challenge and ensure the safety and

security of the country. The authorities are actively pursuing investigations into potential links between certain Afghan nationals and illicit networks associated with criminal and terrorist elements. The focus is on enhancing border security and implementing stringent measures to identify and apprehend individuals engaged in unlawful activities.

The government is collaborating with intelligence agencies to develop comprehensive strategies to counteract these threats. This situation emphasizes the importance of border control, immigration regulations, and intelligence-sharing to effectively curb criminal and terrorist elements operating within the country. Citizens are urged to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities to law enforcement agencies. The collective effort of the community and robust security measures is crucial in mitigating the risks associated with the involvement of Afghan nationals in criminal and terrorist endeavors.

City Model School's annual ceremony held

By Adam Khan Wazir

LOWER WAZIRISTAN: In an annual prize distribution ceremony held at City Model School Dabkot Wana, a private educational institution in Lower Waziristan district, to celebrate the achievements of the outstanding students. The event witnessed the participation of tribal elders, principals from various private institutions, teachers, students, and others.

The chief guest of the ceremony, principal Gul Hassan Wazir of Musa Nika Public School Dabkot Wana, honored the occasion and distributed prizes, including trophies, and medals, among the achieving students. Speaking on the occasion, Gul Hassan Wazir urged the students to approach their studies with dedication and determination than nothing could impede their success. He also encouraged the students to transcend the economic barriers for getting education because it is the only way to attain future success.

Expressing the belief that quality education is essential, the host principal, Zer Mohammad Wazir of City Model School, Dabkot Wana, congratulated the students and their parents, saying that despite the ongoing challenging conditions, the school is dedicated to providing quality education and training to ensure the students could excel in their future. In the closing statement, Zer Wazir extended gratitude to the guests and the school staff, underscoring the commitment to fostering educational excellence in the region.

7-day skill development training for women started

By Adam Khan Wazir

CHITRAL: A seven-day long Skill Development Training Program for Women is organized by the District Youth Office, in collaboration with High-Tech, in the Brus area of Lower Chitral. Under the guidance of Deputy Commissioner Lower Chitral Muhammad Imran, the training aims to empower women by imparting modern sewing and embroidery skills.

District Youth Officer Sardar Ali Wazir highlighted the primary objective of the training, emphasizing the importance of making women in Lower Chitral financially independent and equipping them with practical skills. He further said that the program would run throughout the week and cater 30 women on daily basis.

SIFC spearheads telecom revolution in Pakistan

Minister Saif emphasizes forum's role in paving the way for digital transformation and fostering foreign direct investment

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: In a groundbreaking move, the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) has emerged as a driving force catapulting Pakistan's telecommunication sector into an era of unparalleled progress and innovation. During a press conference, Dr. Umar Saif highlighted the collaborative endeavors of all stakeholders, including military and political leadership within the SIFC framework. He credited this collaborative effort for the remarkable strides observed in decision-making processes, emphasizing the forum's role in steering the nation towards digital transformation and attracting foreign direct investment.

Dr. Saif underscored the forum's significance in enabling incoming governments to make timely decisions crucial for the country's development and public interest, thanks to the presence of the Special Investment Facilitation Council.

A noteworthy success story arising from SIFC's intervention involves the resolution of a longstanding case related to hundreds of mega-

hertz spectrum, entangled in a legal quagmire since 2014. The SIFC forum played a pivotal role, prompting the Sindh High Court to expedite proceedings, culminating in a verdict on December 14. Valued at one billion, this spectrum victory marks a significant achievement for the caretaker government, opening avenues for enhanced connectivity and communication services.

Dr. Saif also commended SIFC's crucial role in formulating and obtaining approval for the nation's first space policy. This policy sets the stage for groundbreaking advancements, including the imminent availability of satellite internet to the public and a substantial improvement in the existing network infrastructure.

Another notable feather in SIFC's cap is the successful implementation of the Right of Way Policy for Spectrum Auction and Laying of Optical Fiber Cable. This policy facilitates the seamless integration of modern technologies into the country's telecommunication framework, showcasing SIFC's pivotal role in shaping the future of Pakistan's telecom landscape.

Army, KP govt collaborate to tackle illiteracy in SW

"Ilm Sabb Ke Liye" Campaign Aims to Bring Light to Remote Areas

News Desk

SOUTH WAZIRISTAN: In a concerted effort to combat illiteracy, the army has joined with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government to launch the "Ilm Sabb Ke Liye" campaign in the distant regions of South Waziristan. This initiative can successfully dismantle terrorism and underscore a commitment to fostering education in areas that have long lacked access.

As a notable achievement of the campaign, the Government Primary School in Madijan, dormant since 2015, has reopened its doors. This development signals a significant stride in providing educational opportunities for the local children in South Waziristan. To pro-



SOUTH WAZIRISTAN: Local administration and army personnel attending the launch of the "Ilm Sabb Ke Liye" campaign in the distant region, here on Tuesday.

mote a positive academic environment, the army orchestrated a special function at the school, distributing books and stationery to the eager children. This gesture

aims to motivate students and enhance their educational experience.

As the campaign progresses, efforts are underway to revitalize educational

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: In a bid to ease the financial burden on overseas Pakistanis importing used or refurbished mobile phones, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has increased the depreciation allowance from 30% to 60%. This positive change, outlined in Valuation Ruling Number 1834 of 2023 by the Directorate of Valuation Karachi,

aims to benefit international travelers, particularly overseas Pakistanis.

The adjustment specifically targets mobile phones up to five years old, offering a more favorable assessment of duties and taxes. This move is designed to provide cost savings and alleviate the tax implications associated with the import of used or refurbished mobile phones.

It's crucial to note that this

concession is applicable exclusively to individuals, offering relief to overseas Pakistanis. Commercial importers, however, remain subject to standard duties and taxes based on the customary higher customs values. The ruling provides a comprehensive list of brands and models for assessing duties and taxes on mobile phones. For models not explicitly mentioned but imported in com-

mercial quantities, clearance collectorates are advised to assess them under Section 81 of the Customs Act, 1969. The Directorate will determine the final values in such cases.

One of the primary objectives of this ruling is to address under-invoicing practices, promoting consistent and uniform valuation methods. The FBR underscores the importance of accepting declared values unless there

is clear evidence of mis-declaration. This initiative aligns with a directive from the Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO), urging the FBR to apply appropriate depreciated values based on the physical condition and model of used mobile phones. The FTO emphasizes the need for uniform valuation methods and consistent application of declared values, except in cases of evident mis-declaration.

HEC announces Saudi scholarships for Pakistani students

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has unveiled a new scholarship program aimed at supporting post-graduate students in pursuing their studies. The scholarship offers a unique opportunity for post-graduates to enroll in academic programs at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

In an official Instagram post, the HEC emphasized that the esteemed King Abdulaziz University is extending scholarships exclusively to non-Saudi candidates seeking to pursue higher education abroad. Eligible candidates must be residing in Pakistan to apply for these scholarships. To access detailed information and application procedures, interested students are encouraged to visit the university's official website.

The HEC has urged applicants to direct any specific queries related to the scholarship program directly to the respective university.

In a separate development, the HEC took action against the University of Lakki Marwat, imposing a ban on the institution from granting new admissions or affiliations to students. The decision was announced via the HEC's official X account, citing serious irregularities that adversely affected the quality of education provided by the university. As the HEC continues its commitment to facilitating educational opportunities, the newly announced scholarship program opens doors for non-Saudi students in Pakistan to pursue advanced studies at one of Saudi Arabia's prestigious universities.

Media urged for factual reporting on CPEC, countering propaganda

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Speakers at the training workshop here on Sunday called upon the Pakistani media to engage in objective and factual reporting on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and counter the negative propaganda against the game-changer project.

The journalists are the source of information for the public and their impartial reporting can convey authentic information about CPEC to the people of Pakistan, they said. The speakers expressed these remarks during a three-day training workshop organized by the Center for Democracy and Climate Studies (CDCS) for the journalists of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Bao Zhong, Counsellor of the Political and Media Section, Embassy of China to Pakistan while speaking to the participants said that the Pakistani media was playing a vital role in promoting CPEC and creating a positive image of the China-Pakistan bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields beneficial for both the nations. She however said the fake news and negative propaganda against the CPEC still exist in some sections of the media which should be countered by the journalists. She said that the Chinese embassy was always open to answer queries about CPEC or information related to any project initiated by the Chinese embassy.

She urged the journalists to do factual reporting on CPEC and play their role against malicious media campaigns and disinformation against the projects. Ex-



ISLAMABAD: The participants of a training workshop engage in objective and factual reporting on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

pressing deep affection for Pakistani friends, Ms. Zhong, with over six years of service in the country, emphasized the robust foundation of the China-Pakistan relationship, attributing it to the profound political trust, particularly exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

She expressed the confidence in ongoing collaboration with the Pakistani government and encouraged media and citizens to contribute valuable insights for the continued success of China-Pakistan relations. She highlighted the warm reception of Pakistani visitors in China, underscoring the reciprocal treatment she and her family receive in Pakistan. Motivated by these strong ties, she called for joint efforts to further deepen and strengthen cooperation, urging the passing on of this relationship from generation to generation.

Ms. Zhong emphasized collaborative endeavors at both government and private sector levels, encouraging increased business-to-business (B2B) cooperation. She stressed the significance of encouraging Pak-

istani youth to study in China and return to contribute to their homeland, focusing on highlighting commonalities. She urged a collective focus on these areas, seeking advice and active promotion from Pakistani media to maximize joint benefits.

Highlighting the initial focus on infrastructure and energy, she stressed the importance of empowering Pakistan through energy projects, subsequently moving towards broader industrial cooperation. She said that China extends a helping hand to Pakistan in overcoming energy challenges, paving the way for increased industrial productivity and collaboration. The Counsellor said that China sees the world as a big family, echoing a philosophy of global unity and cooperation the Belt and Road Initiative is presented as a tangible effort towards building a global community of shared future.

Despite challenges such as the impact of COVID-19, China remains confident in its progress under the leadership of President Xi Jinping and the Communist Party of China. Naghmana Hashmi, former ambassador of Pak-

istan to China speaking on the occasion, said that the media should do impartial reporting on CPEC. Highlighting the significance of CPEC for Pakistan, she said bilateral cooperation under CPEC has contributed to Pakistan's energy and infrastructure development while the second phase focuses on poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, agriculture and industrial development in Pakistan.

Former Vice Chancellor of Sargodha University Dr. Ishfaq Ahmad said that the media's role was significant in shaping public opinion about CPEC. He hailed the Pakistan's media role and its contribution towards CPEC development. He also said that higher education institutions can play a major role in reaping the real benefits of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by bridging a gap in the language and cultural sectors of both countries. Prominent journalists and anchors/analysts Javed Iqbal, Rasheed Safi, Aoun Sahi, Sherish Qureshi, Mian Ibrar Hussain and Muhammad Imran also attended the three-day training workshop

PTI chief challenges cipher case indictment in IHC

Khan appeals IHC, urges suspension of indictment, trial proceedings

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Imran Khan, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and former prime minister, has filed an appeal with the Islamabad High Court (IHC), contesting his indictment in the cipher case. He aims to nullify the December 12 order of the special court under the Official Secrets Act, asserting that the trial court overlooked crucial perspectives of facts and law.

In the fresh petition, Khan argues that the proceedings are illegitimate and not maintainable. He urges the court to set aside the

impugned order, seeking the suspension of the December 12 order and trial proceedings until a decision is reached on the new petition.

Terming his trial "illegal and unlawful," Khan implores the high court to discharge him from the case.

The IHC has scheduled the hearing on the petition for December 20, with Justice Mianqul Hassan Aurangzeb presiding over the proceedings.

The cipher case controversy emerged on March 27, 2022, when Khan, during a public rally, presented a letter claiming it to be a ci-

pher from a foreign nation conspiring against the PTI government.

The contents and the nation's identity were undisclosed. Khan later accused the United States, involving Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu. The National Security Committee (NSC) found no evidence of a foreign conspiracy, and audio leaks revealed discussions among Khan, Asad Umar, and Azam about the US cipher. The federal cabinet assigned the case to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), leading to legal challenges and summonses that Khan initially contested but later faced.

Family of political leaders targeted

Usman Dar's mother claims police vandalize house, jostle her

By our correspondent

SIALKOT: Serious allegations have emerged as the mother of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Usman Dar accuses Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) leader Khawaja Asif of orchestrating an attack on her house. The incident, she claims, took place while she was asleep, prompting her to appeal to Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa to take notice.

"I was asleep at home when Khawaja Asif had my house attacked again. [They] broke the door and entered my house," she stated. She further alleged that she was manhandled during the attack, with her shirt torn and hair pulled. Dar's mother, undeterred

by the incident, asserted her determination to file nomination papers for the upcoming general elections scheduled for February 8 next year. "When they heard that I was submitting my nomination papers, they [Khawaja Asif] sent 20 people to my house who manhandled me. No one can force me into submitting to do what they want," she declared, adding that she would even contest the polls if incarcerated.

Khawaja Asif vehemently denied the allegations, stating, "I have nothing to do with such vengeful politics." He emphasized his history of respecting political rivals and their families, noting the legal challenges faced by his own family members.

Addressing the media, Asif said, "My politics is based on commitment, principles, and loyalty to the people." He cited past petitions against him during different governments but asserted that his integrity remained intact.

District Police Officer (DPO) Hasan Iqbal, shedding light on the police raid, mentioned that it was conducted to apprehend Umar Dar, wanted in various cases. The DPO dismissed claims of physical assault but acknowledged the use of inappropriate language during the operation. He stated that Umar Dar's involvement in activities against the state led to the registration of cases, and he remains in touch with his family on social media.