

Supreme Court sets precedent

No objections to constituency delimitation after election schedule issued

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: In a groundbreaking decision with far-reaching implications, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has declared that objections to the delimitation of constituencies cannot be raised once the election schedule has been officially announced. The verdict, delivered by a three-member bench headed by Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, virtually eliminates the possibility of any delay in the upcoming general elections scheduled for February 8.

The specific case revolved around appeals against the delimitation of two provincial assembly seats in Quetta. The Supreme Court not only overturned the decision of the Balochistan High Court against the delimitation but also accepted the Election Commission of Pakistan's appeal in this matter.



Justice Athar Minallah, questioning the legal authority of the high court in matters concerning the election commission, highlighted the need to draw a clear line after the issuance of the election schedule. Justice

Ex PM Shehbaz ready to contest upcoming polls in Karachi

By our correspondent

LAHORE: In a strategic move that could reshape the political landscape, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif is reportedly considering contesting the upcoming general elections for both national and provincial seats from Karachi. PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif dropped a significant hint during a parliamentary board meeting on Monday, directing Karachi's organizational officials to initiate Shehbaz Sharif's election campaign in the city.

Nawaz Sharif, reflecting on the political landscape and the challenges faced by the PML-N, expressed his intention to field Shehbaz Sharif in Karachi.

This move suggests a strategic shift in the party's electoral strategy, aiming to expand its influence beyond traditional strongholds.

During the meeting, Nawaz Sharif lamented historical challenges, stating,

"Those who were following the constitution and law were debarred from politics. When action was taken against those who violated the constitution, then we were attacked." He recounted the sacrifices made by the PML-N and the hurdles faced in the political journey, including detention and exile.

While emphasizing the party's accomplishments, Nawaz Sharif highlighted the utilization of Thar coal for electricity production and infrastructure projects like the Lowari tunnel.

Expressing disappointment over electoral outcomes, he noted, "We bring peace to Karachi, but votes were cast for somebody else."

The potential candidacy of Shehbaz Sharif in Karachi underscores the PML-N's efforts to diversify its representation and appeal to a broader demographic. As the political dynamics evolve, the PML-N's strategic decisions are expected to play a crucial role in the upcoming elections.

Mansoor Ali Shah emphasized that post-schedule, all litigation related to constituencies loses its effectiveness, ensuring the integrity of the election process.

Acting Chief Justice Sardar Tariq Masood expressed his perplexity regarding the desire for election delays, stating, "I don't understand why everyone wanted the election to be delayed. Let elections take place in the

country." Justice Minallah cautioned against setting a precedent that could lead to a flood of applications, emphasizing that once an election schedule is issued, all activities must come to a halt.

He underscored the Election Commission's crucial responsibility to conduct transparent elections on the designated date, February 8.

The case originated from the Balochistan High Court's

Court grants post-arrest bail to Fawad Ch in graft case

By our correspondent

RAWALPINDI: A special court in Rawalpindi approved the post-arrest bail of former federal minister Fawad Chaudhry on Monday in connection with a corruption case. The court directed authorities to release the ex-minister upon submission of a Rs200,000 surety bond. Fawad, a former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmaker, had been arrested in November in relation to a case from August 2022, where he was alleged to have accepted a Rs5 million bribe. Initially remanded in police custody for two days, Fawad was later placed on judicial remand after an extension. He is currently incarcerated at Adiala jail. The decision on Fawad's post-arrest bail comes as the political landscape gears up for the upcoming general elections scheduled for February 8, 2024.

Speaking outside the court, Fawad's brother and lawyer, Faisal Chaudhary, confirmed that Fawad intends to contest the upcoming elections. However, the decision on which party's ticket he will contest from remains undecided and will be revealed as a surprise, according to Faisal. Responding to inquiries about a family rift with sister-in-law Hiba Fawad, Faisal noted that domestic matters would be resolved within the family. The former minister's release, however, may face hurdles as the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has arrested Fawad in a separate corruption case.

NAB Chairman Lt-Gen (retd) Nazir Ahmed Butt signed an arrest warrant for Chaudhry, leading to his custody from Adiala jail. Fawad had been among the PTI leaders arrested during the crackdown on the party after the May 9 violence, where the PTI was accused of involvement in riots. In June, Fawad Chaudhry was present during the launching ceremony of the Istehkame-Pakistan Party (IPP), led by Jahanگیر Tareen, a close political aide to Prime Minister Imran Khan.

PM during the day, declared 'hijacker' at night: Nawaz Sharif

News Desk

LAHORE: In a poignant recollection of his political journey, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif expressed lament during a parliamentary board meeting on Monday. The former prime minister recalled a stark transition from being the premier in the morning of 1999 to suddenly being declared a "hijacker" at night.

Addressing the meeting, Sharif emphasized the challenges faced by those adhering to the constitution and law, asserting, "Those who were following the constitution and law were debarred from politics. When action was taken against those who violated the constitution, then we were attacked."

Sharif recounted the sacrifices made by the PML-N, stating, "We had to face detention and exile for more years than being in power. If the journey of development had continued, then the country might have progressed far."

Highlighting specific achievements, Sharif mentioned the utilization of Thar coal for electricity production, a project that he claimed had been neglected before. He expressed disappointment over political outcomes, noting, "We bring peace to Karachi, but votes were cast for somebody else. We had constructed the Lowari tunnel for the people of Chitral, but they cast their vote for the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)."

PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, in a separate series of meetings on Sunday, asserted that the country was on the brink of economic recovery due to tough decisions taken during the coalition government's tenure.

Several PML-N leaders, including Rana Iqbal, Mian Saqib Khurshid, Javed Ali Shah, and others, met with Shehbaz Sharif in Lahore. Discussions during these meetings focused on party matters and preparations for the upcoming general elections.

The PML-N leaders also extended their congratulations to Shehbaz Sharif on the acquittal of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, marking a notable moment for the party amidst the evolving political landscape.

Cotton arrivals jump 74pc y/y, surpass last year's total

By our correspondent

LAHORE: Cotton arrivals surged by nearly 74 percent year-on-year to 8.024 million bales as of December 15, boosted by favourable weather and higher yields in the main producing provinces of Sindh and Punjab, industry data showed on Monday.

The Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) said in its fortnightly report that the arrivals were significantly higher than the 4.613 million bales recorded in the same period last year, when heavy rains and floods damaged the crop. The PCGA said the arrivals also increased by 3.5 percent from November 30, when they stood at 7.753 million bales.

Sindh has contributed 4.066 million bales, up 87 percent from last year, while Punjab produced 3.596 million bales, up 64 percent from last year, the report said.

The report showed that by December 15, 2023, with 8.024 million bales arriving, output has significantly surpassed last year's total of 4.912 million bales.

As of mid-December 2023, 289,326 bales were sold to exporters/traders and textile mills bought 7,084,870 bales.

With the 2023-24 crop nearing its end, fortnightly flow has declined from a peak of nearly one million bales to 270,234 bales. Currently, 302 ginning factories are operating in the country. Sanghar District in Sindh leads the country with 1.681 million bales, followed by Bahawalnagar in Punjab with 1.013 million bales. Last year, Bahawalnagar had a harvest of 0.622 million bales by the end of the season. Cotton production in the traditionally high-yielding district of Rahim Yar Khan faltered to 0.584 million bales.

Sukkur district in Sindh secured fourth position with 0.543 million bales, while Bahawalpur has produced 0.531 million bales this season. Last year, Sukkur and Bahawalpur produced 0.278 million and 0.358 million bales respectively.

Following a 14.6 percent decline in Pakistan's finished textile product exports in 2022-23, overseas demand is forecast to rebound in 2023-24. As a result, consumption is expected to reach 10 million bales. However, continued currency fluctuations and rising energy and other input costs may hinder further expansion. With improved production this year compared to the abysmally low output of less than five million bales in 2022-23, cotton imports are expected to be lower. Conservative projections suggest imports could be between 4 and 4.2 million bales. Despite the anticipated increase in domestic consumption, the expected rise in domestic production will likely offset the need for increased imports in 2023-24. Trade data shows imports were 4.5 million bales in 2022-23. The decline in local cotton prices within the free trade regime has created export opportunities, prompting an increased forecast of 100,000 bales for 2023-24.



MUZAFFARABAD: Kashmiris protesting against the decision of Indian Supreme Court over Article 370 terming the betrayal of their identity, here on Monday.

Kashmiris denounce Indian SC verdict on 370 as identity betrayal

MUZAFFARABAD: The Indian Supreme Court's contentious decision on December 11 to revoke Article 370 has ignited strong condemnation from the Kashmiris who perceive the ruling as an assault on their internal sovereignty and identity. Critics argue that the decision, viewed by many as a betrayal, exacerbates an already tense situation in the region.

Expressing disillusionment, many Kashmiris feel let down by what they see as an attack on their distinct identity and internal autonomy. The decision is seen as undermining the trust they had placed in the Government of India and the judicial system to address the longstanding Kashmir issue.

Kashmiris assert that the Supreme Court's verdict disregards international norms, including United Nations' resolutions advocating for a democratic and impartial referendum to determine the fate of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK). The abrogation of Article 370, which granted special autonomy to the region, is perceived as a violation of international laws and an attempt to erase their unique identity.

Critics argue that the decision further aggravates tensions in the region, with accusations against the Indian Army of illegal occupation. Kashmiris contend that the ruling reflects a narrow-minded and tyrannical approach, raising concerns about the Modi government's treatment of minorities, particularly within the Kashmiri population. While dissent is not limited to Kashmir alone, voices of concern have emerged from politicians and Kashmiris residing in other parts of India. Many denounce the Supreme Court's decision as a biased move, reflecting broader apprehensions about the government's treatment of minorities.

The unity among Kashmiris, transcending political affiliations and ideological differences, is highlighted as a robust force against what they perceive as a conspiracy to subjugate Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir. Despite the Supreme Court's judgment on Article 370, the Kashmiri sentiment remains resilient, with a prevailing belief that their separate status and identity cannot be erased by legal maneuvers. The situation continues to evolve, with tensions and apprehensions running high in the region.

Protests erupt as KMDC implements 185% fee hike

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Students at Karachi Medical and Dental College (KMDC) took to the streets in protest against a significant 185 percent surge in college fees, as reported by media sources on Monday.

The college administration's notification detailed the revised fee structure, indicating a substantial increase in admission fees. In

the open merit category, the admission fee surged from Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000. For applicants seeking admission through the self-finance category, the admission fee skyrocketed to Rs 100,000, along with an additional total of Rs 1.2 million.

Furthermore, the notification disclosed a surge in tuition fees, escalating from Rs 50,000 to Rs 117,600, further exacerbating financial strain on the student

body. Expressing their discontent, students called upon Mayor Karachi, Murtaza Wahab, to reconsider and revoke the fee hike, emphasizing the financial hardships faced by students amid the country's economic crisis.

Taimur Ahmed, a member of the KMC city council, condemned the exorbitant fee hike, stating, "There is no example of such extortion in terms of fees."

Caretaker PM pledges no more compromise on illegal aliens

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: In a firm and resolute statement, interim Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar underscored Pakistan's unwavering commitment to national security, emphasizing the necessity of repatriating undocumented foreigners, including Afghan nationals. In an op-ed published in The Telegraph, PM Kakar articulated the government's dedication to building a "safer, more peaceful, and prosperous Pakistan" while addressing the concerns surrounding the influx of illegal foreign nationals.



PM Kakar revealed that encounters with security forces had identified 65 terrorists as Afghans, and 16 Afghan nationals had carried out suicide attacks in Pakistan since August 2021. Citing the interim Afghan government's advice to "look inwards," PM Kakar expressed the government's decision to heed this counsel to put its house in order.

The repatriation efforts, characterized as "dignified and safe," have seen 436,790 illegal Afghans returning to their homeland. Emphasizing the government's focus on voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation, PM Kakar clarified that deportation is not the priority. A notable 93% of returnees have done so voluntarily, he added.

Despite Pakistan's historic hospitality, hosting around five million Afghans for four decades, PM Kakar acknowledged the socioeconomic and security costs associated with the influx.

He noted the strain on resources, with many migrants operating in the black market, avoiding taxes, and depressing wages for legal workers. The abrupt withdrawal of Western allies from Afghanistan in August 2021 triggered a new wave of refugees, necessitating careful consideration of their welfare.

To streamline the repatriation process, Pakistan has established 79 transit centers offering free meals, shelter, and medical facilities. Additional crossing points on the Pakistan-Afghan border have been opened to facilitate these efforts. PM Kakar assured that certain at-risk groups, such as musicians, journalists, and human rights activists, would not face deportation, emphasizing the nation's commitment to fulfilling legal, moral, and humanitarian obligations while safeguarding its own security interests.

NADRA clarifies misinformation on 'Form B issuance' deadline

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: In response to a wave of misinformation spreading across social media platforms, the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) issued a comprehensive clarification on Monday, vehemently refuting any alterations in its policy regarding the issuance of "Form B" to the general public.

Contrary to recent claims circulating online, suggesting the imposition of a deadline for obtaining "Form B," NADRA maintained that no such timeframe had been established or implemented. The organization expressed concern over the dissemination of inaccurate information, attributing it to certain elements seeking to create unwarranted panic.

NADRA urged the public to exercise caution and rely on verified sources for accurate news and updates. In an official press release, NADRA emphasized that the statements circulating on the internet were not only unfounded but also misleading to citizens who rely on accurate information.

However, the authority took the opportunity to reassure the public that there had been no modifications to the existing policy governing the issuance of "Form B."

Furthermore, NADRA clarified that there were no imminent plans to introduce changes in the foreseeable future. In a proactive stance, NADRA called upon citizens to act responsibly and refrain from perpetuating false news.

The authority stressed the importance of relying on official channels and verified information to prevent the spread of baseless rumors. As misinformation continues to pose challenges, NADRA remains steadfast in its commitment to transparency and accuracy in providing essential services to the public.

PTA probes reports of social media disruptions

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) announced on Monday that it is actively investigating reports of internet disruptions in "some areas" of the country. The PTA's statement, issued a day after widespread complaints of social media disruptions, clarified that the overall situation of internet access across the country is normal.

On Sunday night, social media sites experienced serious disruptions, with numerous users reporting difficulties in accessing popular platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly known as Twitter). According to Downdetector, these disruptions occurred after 7:00 pm, affecting website versions of various applications. Cities such as Karachi, Lahore, Mirpur Khas, and Rawalpindi were identified as the most affected areas during the disruptions. Some users resorted to reporting the internet lag on WhatsApp. While the exact cause of the outage remains unknown, several internet users complained of slow internet, prompting concerns among the public.

Interestingly, some users noted that turning on a Virtual Private Network (VPN) resolved the slowdown issue, leading to speculation about intentional throttling. A journalist on X expressed, "Having trouble accessing Twitter/X and other social media platforms."

Overall internet seems slow as well. Anyone else in Pakistan facing the same? Many users responded affirmatively, sharing their similar experiences. Another X user raised concerns about limitations on internet access and the use of social media applications in Pakistan, seeking confirmation on this information.



KARACHI: Volunteers busy in rescue works after the building was collapsed due to gas cylinder explosion in Machar Colony area of Karachi, here on Monday.

3 dead, several injured in Karachi’s building collapse

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A two-storey building in Machar Colony on Mauripur Road collapsed following a gas cylinder blast, resulting in at least three people dead and 17 others wounded on Monday. The blast originated in a gas cylinder shop within the building, causing partial damage to an adjacent structure and a nearby vehicle.

Rescue operations were promptly initiated by the authorities, with police, rangers, and rescue teams working at the incident site. The Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi received two bodies and eight injured individuals, including two children and four women. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Keamari Arif Rao Aslam provided insights into the incident, stating that the explosion occurred during the transfer of gas in the shop as a vehicle loaded with gas cylinders arrived for supply.

The immediate aftermath saw a fire, resulting in burn injuries for six of the wounded. To facilitate the rescue operation, police and rangers had to resort to a

baton charge to disperse the crowd in the congested streets surrounding the incident site.

Three buildings neighboring the collapsed structure were also evacuated for inspection due to potential damage. SSP Keamari emphasized that heavy machinery would be employed to remove debris and ensure a thorough inspection of the affected area.

The tragic event brings back memories of the October 11 incident in Karachi’s Shah Faisal Colony, where an under-construction building collapse claimed three lives and left several others injured.

In response to the Shah Faisal Colony incident, Sindh Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (retd) Maqbool Baqar had taken action by suspending four Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) officers for their negligence.

It is pertinent to mention that earlier, a survey conducted by the SBCA Technical Committee on Dangerous Buildings has identified approximately 550 buildings in Karachi and around 650 buildings in other districts of Sindh that are in dilapidated conditions. According to

sources, notices had been issued to the residents of those buildings, urging them to evacuate immediately, as the structures posed a risk of collapse during the rainfall or any untoward situation but the exercise left un-resulted due to lack of commitment.

In anticipation of potential building collapse incidents during the monsoon rains in Karachi, the Sindh government has taken proactive measures by establishing a rain-emergency center in the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA), announced Muhammad Yasin Shar Baloch, the Director General of SBCA. During the rain emergency, technical staff will be available in three shifts to address any emergencies that may arise.

The SBCA DG appealed to the general public to report any building accidents or provide information about dilapidated and dangerous buildings in densely populated areas to the SBCA’s Rain Emergency Center. The official of SBCA claimed that the SBCA is committed to promptly addressing any reports received and taking necessary actions to mitigate risks associated with unstable structures.

Pakistan issues visas to Indian Hindu pilgrims for Katas Raj Visit

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi has issued 62 visas to a group of Indian Hindu pilgrims, allowing them to embark on a pilgrimage to the historic Shree Katas Raj Temples, also known as Qila Katas, situated in the Chakwal district of Punjab. The pilgrimage is scheduled to take place from December 19th to 25th.

In a press release issued on Monday, Charge d’ Affaires Aizaz Khan expressed heartfelt wishes to the pilgrims, extending hopes for a safe journey and a memorable stay in Pakistan. The issuance of these pilgrimage visas falls under the framework of the Pakistan-India Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines, established in 1974. This bilateral agreement has facilitated the annual pilgrimage of thousands of Sikh and Hindu devotees from India, allowing them to participate in various religious festivals and occasions hosted in Pakistan.

Earlier this month, Pakistan granted 104 visas to Indian Hindu pilgrims to participate in the 315th birth anniversary celebrations of Shiv Avtari Satguru Sant Shadaram Sahib at the Shadani Darbar Hayat Pitafi in Sindh. The 300-year-old temple is a sacred place for Hindu devotees from across the globe. The Shadani Darbar was founded in 1786 by Sant Shadaram Sahib, who was born in Lahore in 1708.

The visit to Shree Katas Raj Temples holds great significance for the Hindu community, as these temples are revered for their historical and cultural importance.

The pilgrimage reflects the commitment of both nations to honour and preserve cultural heritage and religious tradition. Pakistan’s initiative to grant visas to Indian Hindu pilgrims aligns with the objective of facilitating visits to religious shrines and promoting interfaith harmony.

No exemption sought for judge spouses’ body searches, SC clarifies

Apex court also expresses surprise at the timing of letter’s leakage

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: In a recent development, the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued a clarification on Monday regarding an alleged request for exemption from body searches for spouses of serving judges at airports. The clarification follows the emergence of a leaked letter in the media, raising questions about the timing and nature of the Supreme Court’s communication.

Contrary to initial reports indicating a plea for exemption, the Supreme Court’s Registrar Office clarified that the court had merely highlighted an inconsistency in security protocols. Dated September 21, 2023, the letter, addressed to the Aviation Division Secretary and ASF

Director General, brought attention to the fact that while spouses of retired judges benefit from an exemption from body searches, the same privilege was not extended to spouses of serving judges.

Quoting the letter, “In the interest of full disclosure, kindly also disclose the Registrar of the Supreme Court’s letter of 21st September 2023 to correct the misconceptions.” It further stated, “The body search exemption rule was not made by the Supreme Court, nor was an exemption sought. The Registrar had simply pointed out an anomaly, which was that the spouses of retired Supreme Court Judges were exempt from body searches, but those of serving Judges were not.”

Sarfraz Bugti Joins PPP on Zardari’s directive

News Desk

QUETTA: In a strategic move ahead of the upcoming general elections on February 8, 2024, former caretaker interior minister Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has officially joined the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). This decision comes shortly after Bugti’s resignation from his previous position, a mandatory step for contesting polls.

Bugti made the announcement during the PPP workers’ convention in Turbat, where PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari was present.

He expressed his delight at entering the electoral fray with the backing of the PPP, emphasizing the significance of Zardari’s leadership. During the convention, Bugti highlighted his hopes for restoring peace in Balochistan under Zardari’s guidance. He urged Zardari to contribute

to local healthcare by establishing a state-of-the-art hospital in Turbat, similar to the one in Sukkur.

In a promise to Zardari, Bugti pledged to make the PPP a progressive party under the veteran leader’s direction.

Bugti’s switch to the PPP comes after his association with the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP). The move has political implications, especially as reports earlier suggested Bugti’s resignation for a potential contest on the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) ticket. As the general elections approach, Bugti expressed confidence that the PPP, under Zardari’s leadership, would challenge narratives against Pakistan. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) recently issued the polling schedule following Supreme Court orders, alleviating concerns about potential delays.

Ahsan Iqbal claims PML-N end ‘Daku Raj’ in Sindh

By our correspondent

LAHORE: Senior leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Ahsan Iqbal, asserted on Monday that his party played a pivotal role in putting an end to the “Daku Raj” (bandits’ rule) in Sindh. Speaking to the media in Lahore, he highlighted the positive impact of Nawaz Sharif’s tenure, emphasizing a period of peace for the people of Sindh.

“Nawaz Sharif has the best record of serving the people of Sindh. Whenever Nawaz Sharif came to power, the people of Sindh witnessed peace,” stated the former planning minister. He specifically mentioned initiatives like the K-IV project to address the water crisis in Karachi and the realization of the Thar coal project through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

“In a bid to address the water crisis in Karachi, the K-IV project was initiated for the people,” he remarked, underscoring the party’s commitment to addressing critical issues in the region.

Despite facing opposition from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in Sindh, Iqbal claimed that PML-N successfully brought peace to the province during its tenure. He reiterated that the party had nothing to do with inflation, placing the blame on the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf’s (PTI) government.

“Ahsan Iqbal calls for ‘competent’ govt to steer country out of economic quagmire,” he had stated earlier, emphasizing the need for a competent government to address economic challenges. Iqbal expressed optimism about the country’s gradual progress and highlighted the potential of the youth.

“Narawal is the stronghold of the PML-N,” he asserted, reaffirming the party’s influence in the region. As political dynamics continue to evolve, the statements from Ahsan Iqbal shed light on the PML-N’s perspective on governance, economic issues, and its role in bringing stability to Sindh.

Oil import bill surges by 5.76% YoY in Nov 23, raising economic questions

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: In a recent report released on Monday, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) disclosed a 5.76% year-on-year increase in Pakistan’s petroleum group import bill for November 2023. The petroleum import bill reached \$1.32 billion, marking a steady ascent from \$1.25 billion during the same period last year. This surge suggests an upward trajectory in the country’s oil expenditure.

While the monthly import bill for petroleum products remained relatively stable, the overall import bill for November exhibited a 2.86%

year-on-year and a 1.82% month-on-month increase, totaling \$4.45 billion. This incremental trend raises questions about the underlying economic dynamics and trade patterns in the nation. In the first five months of the fiscal year 2023-24, total imports experienced a notable decline of 16% year-on-year, amounting to \$21.28 billion. However, the share of petroleum products in the total import bill stood at 29.76% in November 2023, emphasizing the sector’s significant impact.

Surprisingly, the import bill for petroleum products witnessed a substantial decline of 35% in the initial five

months of the fiscal year, dropping to \$5.72 billion from the \$8.8 billion recorded in the corresponding period last year. This decline raises important questions about the potential implications for the energy sector and the overall balance of trade. The transport sector saw a 12% year-on-year decline in imports for November 2023, totaling \$109 million. However, on a sequential basis, a 9% month-on-month increase was observed, indicating potential fluctuations in this sector. Agricultural and other chemicals experienced a 10.67% year-on-year increase and a 12.5% month-on-month rise, reaching

\$863.17 million.

Food imports surged by 14% year-on-year, amounting to \$657 million in November 2023. However, over the first five months of the fiscal year, the sector’s import bill showed a significant decrease of 19.5%, falling to \$2.92 million. The machinery import sector recorded a substantial 43% year-on-year increase, reaching \$552.27 million, signaling potential growth in industrial activities. As Pakistan navigates these economic dynamics, the implications of the oil import bill raise crucial considerations for policymakers and industry stakeholders alike.

LHC rejects Imran’s plea to halt trial in contempt of ECP case

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) has dismissed the application of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, seeking to halt the jail trial in the contempt of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) case. The court has issued notices to the election commission and other relevant parties, soliciting their responses in this matter.

The rejection comes in the wake of Imran Khan’s attempt to stop the jail trial related to the contempt charges brought forth by the Election Commission of Pakistan. Notices have been sent to the election commission and others involved, and the court awaits their responses. The counsel representing the ECP informed the full bench about

the jail trial notification issued by the Punjab Home Department on December 8. The court emphasized that Adiala Jail, located in Rawalpindi, holds jurisdiction over Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Justice Alia Neelam directed the petitioner’s counsel to formally challenge the jail trial notification, stating, “I will challenge the notification. You set the application for day after tomorrow.” The court expressed the need for the proper legal process to be followed, with Justice Neelam highlighting the importance of filing a challenge before making decisions on such applications. Responding to the court’s direction, the counsel affirmed their intent to challenge the notification and highlighted that notices were

received when Imran Khan was in Lahore. The indictment of the former PTI chairman is scheduled for tomorrow, the counsel further stated.

A three-member bench, headed by Justice Alia Neelam, heard the petition. On December 9, Imran Khan challenged the proceedings of the contempt of the election commission case and its subsequent jail trial before the LHC. The petition named the federal government, the Election Commission of Pakistan, and the Adiala Jail superintendent as parties. Imran Khan argued that the ECP initiated contempt proceedings unlawfully, asserting that the commission lacked the authority to try someone for contempt.

Pak women clinches historic win over NZW in super over showdown

News Desk

CHRISTCHURCH: In a nail-biting encounter, Pakistan secured a historic victory over New Zealand in the dead-rubber third Women’s One-Day International (ODI) at Christchurch’s Hagley Oval on Monday.

This triumph marks Pakistan’s maiden ODI win over New Zealand in the women’s cricket landscape, showcasing a remarkable achievement for the team.

The White Ferns, holding an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series, elected to bat first, posting a competitive total of 251-8. Amelia Kerr and Maddy Green stood out, contributing half-centuries to the scoreboard.

Amelia Kerr led the New Zealand charge with a standout performance, top-scoring with 77 off 87 balls,



featuring five fours. Maddy Green added to the total with a 65-ball 65, while Captain Sophie Devine and Suzie Bates made valuable contributions with 29 and 24 runs, respectively. Pakistan’s spin duo, Nashra Sandhu and Ghulam Fatima, played pivotal roles, securing two wickets each.

The contest extended beyond the allotted 100 overs as Pakistan responded with a resilient innings, reaching 251-9. Former captain Bismah

Maroof played a key role, delivering a 68-run innings off 86 balls, including five fours. Her partnership with Aliya Riaz, who contributed a 44-run innings off 84 balls, added 101 runs to the total. Stand-in captain Fatima Sana and Natalia Pervaiz chipped in with 36 and 26 runs, respectively.

As the excitement escalated, the match entered a Super Over, with Pakistan managing to score 11-2. Aliya Riaz played a pivotal role, securing eight runs off Amelia Kerr’s bowling.

LHC orders release of PTI’s Sher Afzal Marwat

By our correspondent

LAHORE: In a significant development, the Lahore High Court (LHC) has issued an order for the release of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senior Vice President Sher Afzal Marwat, who was detained under the Maintenance of Public Order (3MPO) on December 14.

Marwat was apprehended by the police outside the LHC premises as he was leaving the court after attending a lawyers’ convention. Justice Shehram Sarwar Chaudhry presided over the hearing of the petition seeking Marwat’s release.

In his verdict, the court instructed the PTI leader to submit a surety bond for his release. The

incident of Marwat’s arrest was shared by the former ruling party on social media, revealing footage of police officials dragging him by the collar while lawyers attempted to intervene.

The PTI condemned the arrest, expressing concern about the abduction of lawyers within the LHC premises. The party accused the caretaker government

of crossing the boundaries of fascism and called for LHC judges to ensure Marwat’s safe recovery. In a statement, the PTI asserted that such unconstitutional and illegal tactics aim to evade elections and impose individuals aligned with the ‘London plan.’ The party criticized the “continued silence of the judiciary,” stating that it encourages these unlawful actions.

SRK’s ‘Dunki’ to conclude the year

News Desk

NEW DEHLI: As the curtains draw on 2023, Bollywood is celebrating a stellar year at the box office, with a parade of blockbusters captivating audiences and setting cash registers ringing. Theaters across India are witnessing full houses, marking a triumphant return to the cinematic experience.

Bollywood filmmakers unleashed a diverse array of emotions, action-packed sequences, and gripping drama onto the silver screen. From the thunderous success of “Tiger 3” to the adrenaline-pumping narrative of “Jawan” and the spine-chilling suspense of



NEW DEHLI: Bollywood King Shah Rukh Khan along with a co actor posed for a recently released movie, here on Monday.

“Animal,” audiences embraced the cinematic offerings with unwavering enthusiasm. Key highlights of the year included the highly anticipated “Pathaan,” the se-

quel to the iconic “Gadar,” the laughter-inducing “OMG 2,” and the riveting “Salaar” featuring Prabhas. Now, cinephiles are gearing up for the grand finale with Shah

Rukh Khan’s much-awaited “Dunki,” scheduled for release on December 21, 2023.

Shahrukh Khan’s “Jawan” has emerged as a chart-topper, captivating audiences with its compelling storyline and stellar performances. Following closely is Ranbir Kapoor’s intense portrayal in “Animal.” “Pathaan” and “Tiger 3” have also left an indelible mark, contributing significantly to the industry’s success. However, it’s not just the big-budget extravaganzas that stole the spotlight; smaller productions like “1920,” “Mrs. Chatterjee vs. Norway,” and “12th Fail” have also resonated well with audiences, proving

that content remains the king.

Reflecting on this phenomenal year, the creator of “OMG 2” expressed, “It has been a great and historic year for Bollywood.” Trade expert Atul Mohan concurred, stating that Bollywood has witnessed a fantastic year at the box office, with the much-anticipated release of “Dunki” poised to bring this cinematic extravaganza to a glorious conclusion.

As the year bids adieu, Bollywood’s triumphant run at the box office reaffirms its resilience and enduring appeal, promising an exciting future for the industry and its ardent audience.

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Too many red lines crossed

The relentless conflict in Gaza, now spanning over two months, has given rise to a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, despite any signs of de-escalation, Israel has escalated its military campaign aggressively targeting civilians rather than the Hamas militants. A recent US intelligence report reveals that nearly half of the 29,000 air-to-ground munitions used in Gaza in the last ten weeks were "dumb bombs"—unguided and notably imprecise, particularly alarming in densely populated ghetto (Gaza), where unguided munitions pose an elevated threat to civilians. Satellite imagery paints a grim picture, displaying widespread damage extending far beyond the port area into almost every part of Gaza Strip. Furthermore, the deployment of 'dumb bombs' by Israeli forces raises concerns over the civilian death toll, which already appears to be crossing 19,000, may soon reach staggering records.

In the southern part of the enclave, massive overcrowding coupled with a collapsed hospitals has further exacerbated the plight of the people, while the independent observers describe the situation as a "textbook formula for epidemics and a public health disaster", just caused due to the carelessness of the Israeli war tactics simply identifying the barbarian mentality of Netanyahu and his cabinet. Visuals from the strip reveal a stark landscape with scarce concrete structures, as much of the residential buildings have been demolished due to heavy bombing or remaining are bulldozed by the Israeli forces.

Humanitarian conditions are rapidly worsening, with the UN's repeat cautioning that shelters are already beyond the capacity, forcing many individuals to sleep on the streets or under the sky facing severe weather condition with their innocent children. Those who somehow made it to a shelter are lining up for hours for the use of a single toilet. Major cemeteries in Gaza are dangerous to reach, so mourning families are burying their loved ones in the informal graveyards dug in empty lots amid an intense Israeli military operation.

Half of Gaza's 2.3 million residents are currently crammed around Rafah in the southeastern region of the coastal strip, near the border with Egypt. Initially directed by Israel to relocate to the northern half of the strip, civilians have since been ordered to evacuate central and southern areas as Israeli forces continue their offensive against Hamas, a Palestinian political organization that sent hundreds of fighters through frontier fences into Israel during a deadly dawn raid on October 7, resulting in a violent incident that caused more than 1,200 deaths and scores held as hostages.

The UN and numerous medical organizations, seemingly helpless, have confirmed that a substantial number of people are now experiencing severe respiratory illnesses and diarrhea, which can be fatal for young children, already high on Gaza's casualty counter. Additionally, cases of scabies, hepatitis, and, increasingly, malnutrition have also been reported due to shortages of food and clean water. Almost all of Gaza's hospitals are operating at minimal capacity due to shortages of medical supplies, staff, equipment, and fuel required to power these facilities. While this human suffering, death, and destruction are being televised worldwide, the United States vetoed a UN resolution backed by almost all other Security Council members and dozens of other nations demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza. This isolated stance at the UN is indicative of the growing divide between Washington and some of its closest allies over Israel's military actions in Gaza, especially against the human rights violations. France and Japan were among those supporting the call for a cease-fire, whereas the United Kingdom abstained. As the deadly conflict enters its third month, independent observers characterize the US veto as a 'tragic' move, cautioning against further civilian deaths and destruction.

In a rare move, Egypt and Mauritania invoked Resolution 377A (V) to call for an emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), while it is not legally binding, the resolution empowers member states to make collective recommendations—and it did. The 193-member United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in the war-torn enclave of Gaza. On the ground, nothing has changed since then, but the dynamics in the region appear to be changing at a much faster rate as Israel faces an ongoing border exchange with the Iran-backed Hezbollah, which has now intensified. The Lebanon-based group has deployed explosive drones and missiles to target Israeli positions, with retaliatory Israeli airstrikes hitting numerous towns and villages in southern Lebanon. Adding to the mix, the Houthi militia, in control of northern Yemen and potentially backed by Tehran, has escalated its warnings. They are now threatening to block any vessel en route to Israeli ports, expanding on their earlier cautions for ships navigating through the Red and Arabian Seas.

As the conflict in Gaza broadens its contours, many in the West, including US President Joe Biden, appear to be speaking in ways that may indicate to Israel that it is losing the support and sympathy, it had gained shortly after the Hamas attack a little more than two months ago. In his most pointed critique of Israel since the conflict's onset, Biden stated, "They're starting to lose that support by indiscriminate bombing that takes place." During a political fundraiser, the US president also took aim at the Israeli cabinet, labeling it the 'most conservative' government in the country's history.

However, despite the tough rhetoric, Biden's actions seem to contradict his words, while the top boss in Washington adopts a more assertive stance towards Israel, he concurrently supports its war effort and is yet to take measures that could alter the tactics of the Israeli military in ways that minimize civilian casualties in Gaza. To grasp the situation, the media interviewed Rashid Khalidi, a distinguished professor of Arab studies at Columbia University and the bestselling author of 'The Hundred Years' War on Palestine'. Khalidi, known for his expertise in Palestinian identity and nationalism, warned of the potential radicalization in the Arab and Muslim worlds, as well as among immigrant communities in the West, due to the complete alignment of the US with Israel's disproportionate attacks on civilians. With no resolution in sight.

By Ali Mohtashim



As the curtain descended on the annual Global Tech Summit in Silicon Valley, attendees departed with a profound sense of anticipation for the revolutionary wave of innovations that unfolded during the event. The summit, a gathering of tech moguls, startups, and thought leaders, showcased a diverse array of cutting-edge technologies poised to redefine the technological landscape in the coming year. Silicon Valley, renowned as the heartbeat of technological evolution, once again solidified its status as the global epicenter for innovation. The summit served as a melting pot for the exchange of groundbreaking ideas, pushing the boundaries of what's achievable in the tech realm.

From artificial intelligence to blockchain, quantum computing to sustainable tech solutions, the summit covered a spectrum of technological frontiers. Expert speakers delivered keynote addresses, providing insights into the future trajectory of the industry and its potential impact on various sectors. A pivotal moment at the summit was the unveiling of a revolutionary AI-driven healthcare platform, promising heightened diagnostic accuracy and personalized treatment plans. This breakthrough, lever-

aging machine learning and predictive analytics, signifies a paradigm shift in the healthcare sector.

Blockchain enthusiasts were treated to a captivating demonstration of a decentralized finance (DeFi) ecosystem, challenging traditional banking structures. This showcase illuminated the potential for enhanced financial inclusivity but also underscored the importance of transparency in the financial realm. The summit marked the dawn of a new era in finance, where decentralized technologies pave the way for a more accessible and transparent financial landscape.

A watershed moment in quantum computing unfolded as the summit revealed a groundbreaking quantum processor. This technological marvel, promising unparalleled computational capabilities, stands poised to redefine the landscape of cryptography, optimization, and drug discovery. It amplifies the technological arsenal available to industries, marking a significant leap forward in the realm of quantum computing.

In a concerted effort to foster a sustainable future, the summit directed its focus towards eco-friendly tech solutions. Innovations in renewable energy, smart cities, and sustainable agriculture took center stage, underscoring the tech industry's unwavering commitment to constructing a greener and more resilient world. This deliberate emphasis on sustainability echoes a broader industry-wide dedication to addressing environmental challenges and steering technological advancements towards a more sustainable trajectory.

Going beyond mere product showcases,

the summit evolved into a dynamic platform for intellectual exchange. Renowned industry leaders actively participated in thought-provoking panel discussions and engaging workshops, delving into pivotal topics encompassing ethical AI, data privacy, and the indispensable role of technology in tackling global challenges.

This collaborative atmosphere not only facilitated meaningful dialogue but also fostered a profound sense of unity among diverse stakeholders. The summit, therefore, not only showcased cutting-edge products but also laid the groundwork for future collaborative endeavors, positioning itself as a pivotal hub for intellectual discourse and industry collaboration.

In a denouement marked by grace, the Global Tech Summit concluded, leaving attendees with a tangible sense of anticipation. The innovations unveiled during the summit are poised to create ripples across various industries and societies globally, heralding a future where technology breaks through conventional boundaries. Silicon Valley, once again solidifying its status as the epicenter of technological advancement and innovation, remains at the forefront, guiding the trajectory into a future characterized by avant-garde solutions and collaborative initiatives. The curtains falling on the summit signify not just an end but a prelude to a new era where cutting-edge technologies are set to redefine the landscape of possibilities.

By Ehtasham Anwar

The transfer of power in August 2021 marked a pivotal moment for Afghanistan, with the current caretaker government inheriting an array of challenges from its predecessor, the previous republic. This transitional period has become a critical juncture, shaping the dynamics between Afghanistan and Pakistan. To comprehend the intricacies of the current situation, it is imperative to delve into the specific issues that have been bequeathed to the caretaker government and explore how these challenges are influencing the bilateral relationship between the two nations.

In the backdrop of the two-decade American-led invasion of Afghanistan, a nuanced web of complexities has woven itself into the fabric of relations between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries. Over the years, there has been a prevailing apprehension, nurtured in the course of foreign interference, particularly during the recent decades of conflict. The transition to the caretaker government in August 2021 brought with it a plethora of challenges inherited from the preceding republic. Optimism surrounded the expectation that the change in leadership with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) taking control would usher in improved relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Initial diplomatic engagements, especially during the IEA-mediated talks between the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Pakistan, hinted at collaborative efforts. However, these aspirations were dashed when the peace talks faced a dramatic setback, leading to Pakistan's declaration of discontinuing dialogue with the TTP.

As the impasse unfolded, the frequency of attacks in Pakistan increased, amplifying pressure on the Afghan government. The narrative from Pakistani officials em-

phasized the alleged use of Afghanistan's territory against Pakistan. This friction escalated with the interim government of Pakistan's unprecedented decision to expel millions of Afghan refugees, further straining the atmosphere between the two nations.

In the diplomatic arena, talks between Pakistani officials and the TTP were progressing positively in Kabul. Sources indicate that significant headway had been made, with "90 percent of the issues agreed upon." However, a shift in Pakistan's military leadership, with General Asim Munir assuming command, steered a change in approach, opting for military action over dialogue. The subsequent cancellation of talks led to an upswing in the frequency of hostilities.

Compounding the situation, Pakistani authorities urged the Afghan government to take decisive action against the TTP, including arrest, imprisonment, and extradition to Pakistan. Afghanistan's reluctance stemmed from the complex dynamics, as the TTP had played a role against NATO and the United States, aligning with Afghan values. The multifaceted challenges faced by the Afghan government in navigating these complexities were evident when the Pakistani request to relocate tribal refugee settlements was accepted.

Simultaneously, Afghanistan advocated for a negotiated peace with the TTP, acknowledging the potential repercussions of escalating hostilities.

While the tensions persist, there remains a recognition within Afghanistan that sustained dialogue and understanding are pivotal in resolving the current impasse. The nuanced perspective emphasizes the need to differentiate between specific actions and decisions of certain circles within Pakistan and the broader Pakistani populace. The hope for strategic patience and engagement underscores Afghanistan's desire for

constructive relations, fostering stability and cooperation in the region. In the intricate landscape of regional dynamics, Afghanistan grapples with the challenge of balancing security considerations while fostering cooperative relationships with neighboring nations. The current Afghan government, as a nascent administration, is cautious about provoking hostility with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and potentially opening another front of conflict.

A key concern for Afghanistan is the potential transformation of the TTP into the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKAP-Daesh). The overlap of members between these groups adds a layer of complexity and poses a significant threat to Afghan stability. A high-ranking official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Afghanistan emphasized the country's commitment to assisting Pakistan in its security endeavors. However, there is a reluctance to undertake actions that could jeopardize Afghanistan's security and broader interests. Criticism was directed at what was perceived as misguided policies under General Asim Munir's leadership. The nuanced approach of the Afghan government suggests a hesitancy to comply with Pakistan's desire for military action against the TTP. While Afghanistan may not align with TTP actions in Pakistan, there is a recognition of the delicate situation posed by the group's activities.

Addressing one of Pakistan's requests, the Afghan government cooperated by relocating tribal refugees from areas near the Durand Line, stemming from past military operations in Pakistan's tribal regions. This move was made with an understanding that negotiation and peace with the TTP should be the ultimate solution. Kabul communicated the ease and cost-effectiveness of pursuing peace at the present moment. However, a warning was issued, indicating that if hostilities between Pakistan and

the TTP escalate, reaching a peaceful resolution may become more challenging and expensive. It's crucial to note the divergence in information provided by Pakistani authorities to their public regarding the TTP's main demands. The Afghan perspective underscores the need for transparency and accurate information dissemination, drawing parallels with past misinformation, such as the claim of "India having 12 consulates in Afghanistan" during the previous two decades.

The negotiations in Kabul revealed a nuanced stance from the TTP, demonstrating flexibility by conceding some demands during talks. This positions Afghanistan in a delicate scenario, carefully navigating its relationship with Pakistan while managing internal and external expectations. The multifaceted nature of the regional dynamics necessitates a comprehensive understanding of ground realities for sustained peace and stability. In the complex realm of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, challenges persist, calling for nuanced diplomatic efforts and a shared commitment to dialogue. Recent discussions involving the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have brought forth demands aimed at resolving key issues, presenting an opportunity for constructive engagement.

The TTP's primary requests revolve around compensating tribal areas for the damages incurred during past conflicts, securing the release of prisoners, withdrawing the Pakistani army from tribal regions, and reinstating tribal laws. Positioned as demands conducive to a peaceful resolution, these propositions advocate for an alternative to prolonged conflict. The onus lies not only on governments but also on political and religious entities and the people of Pakistan to scrutinize and form their perspectives on these matters. A peaceful and negotiated settlement not only stands as a viable path for Pakistan but also offers relief to the

President Biden is not the only US leader to support Israel amid criticism of alleged abuses against Palestinians, and he likely won't be the last. Almost half a century ago, Richard Nixon, the 37th President, authorised a crucial arms airlift during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, also known as the October War, the Ramadan War, or the 1973 Arab-Israeli War – a conflict with various names.

Despite being unselfconsciously anti-Semitic, Nixon ended up being loved in Israel for his support during the Yom Kippur War, roughly a year before his presidency was cut short by the infamous Watergate scandal. Many years later, as an elderly statesman and self-declared foreign policy guru, Nixon wrote in his book 'In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal,' almost prophetically: "No president can ever abandon Israel." Across 46 presidencies and counting, none has deviated from this stance except Jimmy Carter, who in 2006, authored 'Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid,' becoming the first former president to openly critique Israel's policies. But Carter was always an outlier, experts believe, and that's unsurprising.

In the book, Carter voiced concerns about the construction of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, arguing that these actions impede the prospects for a two-state solution. The title itself stirred controversy as Carter drew a parallel between the situation in Israel and the occupied territories and the apartheid system that once existed in South Africa. This comparison sparked both criticism and debate.

Ronald Reagan, Carter's successor, while pro-Israel, still managed to end a conflict between Israel and Lebanon. According to experts, that was done over a phone call to then prime minister Menachem Begin. In 1983, a year after the conflict, Reagan told the public his administration halted the sale of F-16 jets until Israel withdrew from Lebanon. Experts believe that all presidents, including Biden, have leverage over Israel in various ways, especially as Israel relies on US weapons to combat Hamas.

Fast forward to Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump; he relocated the US Embassy to Jerusalem, officially recognising it as Israel's capital. This controversial step marked a departure from decades of official US policy. The opening in 2018 occurred during a particularly tumultuous time for the region, just before what Palestinians refer to as Nakba Day.

Biden is no exception

When questioned about the current administration's policies toward the region, especially related to the conflict in Gaza, Dr Barnett R. Rubin, former director of studies and senior fellow at the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) of New York University, remarked, "This isn't a policy of the Biden administration; it's a personal policy of President Joe Biden. And we can see that in the growing protests against the policy by members of his own administration, there have been letters written by people in the State Department and the White House. There was a demonstration by White House staffers in front of the White House."

Dr Rubin explained that the policy strongly mirrors President Biden's personal views, with his views on Israel and Palestinians closely aligning with those of most Americans. These views, he said, were shaped by early experiences during a time when the country was governed by more left-wing leadership before the occupation of the territories in 1967. "President Biden still seems to perceive Israel as a plucky nation surrounded by hostile enemies dedicated to its destruction," he added. According to Dr Rubin, Biden appears to lack an understanding of why the United States is increasingly isolated globally for tolerating or even supporting what many consider a tremendously disproportionate, some say genocidal, response by Israel.

Commenting on the public sentiment regarding the conflict, which seems to be unfavorable, Dr Rubin stated, "The US is being seen negatively. It appears not just as a supporter but as an ally and co-conspirator with Israel in carrying this out."

"But I'm uncertain if Biden has the resolve to take a position against Israel," he mentioned during a phone interview from the South of France, where he is currently located. When questioned about the potential for increased radicalisation, particularly in the Muslim world, due to the atrocities committed by Israel and subsequently broadcasted on social media platforms, Dr Rubin responded, "I believe we certainly can expect an increase in radicalisation."

"I see no sign that President Biden understands that. Ob-

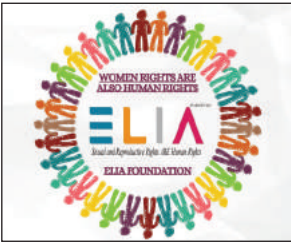
viously, there are many people in the administration who understand that and they are trying to appeal to President Biden to change his policy, but he seems quite set in his worldview of Israel, which seems to have been determined by the movie Exodus," explained Dr Rubin.

As the conflict in Gaza enters its third month, an increasing number of experts are debating the day after strategy. Commenting on the post-war scenario Dr Rubin said: "The United States says the day after we have to be on the road to a two state solution. The Israeli government staunchly opposes any notion of a two-state solution. So, the question arises: will the United States take any action on this matter? Historically, it has not. The two policies have been in opposition for decades, but the United States has taken minimal action to address it."

Drawing a comparison between the era when Reagan successfully halted the bombing of Lebanon in 1982 and Biden's efforts to cease the ongoing Gaza conflict, Dr Rubin emphasised that the former was a war of choice. In contrast, the current Israeli assault is framed as a response to the worst atrocity committed against Jews since World War Two. "There is genuine fury and determination to respond as forcefully as possible. This is what they call a war of no choice rather than a war of choice," he explained.

When asked about any advice for the president, Dr Rubin, a prominent expert on Afghanistan and South Asia and the author of eight books, was unequivocal about a potential strategy for Biden to halt the ongoing conflict. He stated, "I would say you have to cut off the supply of weapons to Israel. If we continue to arm them for certain actions, we can't prevent them from carrying them out. And I would urge Israel to release Marwan Barghouti from prison."

Explaining further, he noted that Barghouti, often referred to as 'Palestine's Nelson Mandela,' could play a crucial role in implementing an agreement. Over the years, the former leader of Tanzim, a militant faction of Fatah, has positioned himself as the sole individual capable of uniting rival Palestinian political groups. Despite spending two decades in Israeli custody, he retains a reputation for integrity and heroism in the eyes of Palestinians and at one point had a fairly serious chance of winning over Mahmud Abbas, the current President of Palestinian Authority.



Earthquake jolts Islamabad & AJK, spreads fear

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: A magnitude 5.8 earthquake struck Islamabad and its surrounding areas, including parts of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), causing panic among residents on Monday. The seismic event occurred at 3.19 pm local time, with the epicenter located in the Doda district of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), at a depth of 140 kilometers.

The tremors were felt beyond the federal capital, reaching Islamabad's suburbs and affecting regions in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. While the earthquake instilled fear and anxiety, there have been no immediate reports of casualties or damages. Authorities are actively monitoring the situation and advising residents to remain vigilant. Reports indicate that the impact extended to other areas, including Samahni and Bhimbhar in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Peshawar. The widespread reach of the earthquake underscores the seismic activity prevalent in the region due to the convergence of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates.

Zainab Tariq, a 27-year-old student in Islamabad,



shared her experience, saying, "I was sitting in my room when the building suddenly started shaking. I ran downstairs but couldn't see anyone else outside, so I thought it was not felt by many people." Given Pakistan's geographical location and its position on tectonic plate boundaries, earthquakes are not uncommon in the country. The incident emphasizes the importance of disaster preparedness and mitigation measures,

highlighting the ongoing need for efforts to enhance resilience and response mechanisms.

Given Pakistan's geographical location and its position on tectonic plate boundaries, earthquakes are not uncommon in the country. The incident emphasizes the importance of disaster preparedness and mitigation measures, highlighting the ongoing need for efforts to enhance resilience and response mechanisms. The

earthquake triggered painful memories of a catastrophic quake that struck the region years ago, claiming the lives of an estimated 75,000 people. Shaheen School, a multi-storey building, became a symbol of tragedy as parents gathered in search of their children. The recent seismic activity rekindles the trauma and loss experienced by the community, serving as a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities faced in earthquake-prone regions.

US President Biden unharmed as car collides with convoy

News Desk

WILMINGTON: President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden emerged unharmed after a car collided with a motorcade SUV that was part of the president's security detail on Sunday night. The incident occurred shortly after the Bidens left his campaign headquarters in downtown Wilmington.

According to a Reuters witness, the collision took place at around 8:07 p.m. (0107 GMT) as the Bidens were leaving the Biden-Harris 2024 headquarters. The White House press pool report stated that the president and the first lady had a meal with members of his re-election team before the incident. Moments after Biden responded to a reporter's question, a silver sedan with Delaware license plates collided with a motorcade SUV at an intersection near the campaign headquarters. Television footage showed secret service agents escorting Biden to his car after the impact.

Despite the collision, President Biden and First Lady Jill Biden were reported as safe. The silver sedan, which sustained damage to its bumper, was swiftly surrounded by security officers. Agents secured the area and drew weapons on the driver, who raised his hands in compliance. The incident highlights the challenges and risks associated with the security measures surrounding the president's movements. Investigations into the circumstances of the collision are expected, as the Secret Service assesses the security protocols during the incident.

PHC reserves verdict on PTI's plea for judicial oversight in polls

By our correspondent

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has raised questions about the status of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) petition seeking the involvement of the judiciary in overseeing the upcoming general elections, following the recent Supreme Court order. A two-member PHC bench, led by Chief Justice Muhammad Ibrahim, heard the case, and later reserved its verdict after considering arguments from all parties.

The Supreme Court, in a recent development, overturned a Lahore High Court verdict related to the appointment of Returning Officers (ROs) and District Returning Officers (DROs), directing the Election Commissioner to announce the election schedule. The PHC's Chief Justice Muhammad Ibrahim, along with Justice Shakeel Ahmed, sought clarification on the PTI's petition in light of this decision.

During the proceedings, Chief Justice Ibrahim inquired about the value of the PTI's petition, suggesting that it only challenged a declaration of the election com-

mission. Using a poetic verse, he pondered, "Jab Dard Mein Dil Ho To Dawa Keejay, Jab Dil Hi Na Ho To Kya Keejay?" Justice Shakeel Ahmed questioned the PTI's lawyer regarding the petition's significance following the Supreme Court's verdict.

Addressing the PTI lawyer, the court inquired whether the party was seeking a change in DROs. The court then sought the advocate general's opinion on the admissibility of the petition after the Supreme Court's decision, emphasizing the election commission's jurisdiction to decide who conducts the elections.

The court expressed concerns about a potential split in supervision between the judiciary and bureaucracy, highlighting that the election commission holds the authority to determine election conduct. The PTI lawyer argued that with over 700 petitions under Section 3 MPO before the PHC, transparency in elections was crucial.

Chief Justice Ibrahim questioned the Election Commission's trust in the judiciary, referring to a letter in which the PHC suggested

contacting the National Judicial Policy Committee.

The court raised concerns about high courts' reluctance to provide judges for elections, with the Balochistan High Court expressing willingness but later excusing itself. Expressing confidence in the election commission, Chief Justice Ibrahim emphasized the court's duty to ensure fair and transparent elections.

The Election Commission's lawyer assured the court of the provincial election commissioner's readiness to submit an affidavit on transparent elections. The court concluded by stating that elections would proceed as planned, echoing the Supreme Court's stance.

The PHC questioned the admissibility of the application after the Supreme Court's decision and emphasized the national importance of holding general elections. The court sought clarity on whether changes in ROs and DROs were possible after the election schedule's issuance, with the lawyer noting that even the election commission could not make changes post-schedule.

News about Dawood Ibrahim's poisoning fake

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In another instance of misinformation, Indian media's sensational claims regarding the alleged poisoning of underworld figure Dawood Ibrahim in Karachi have been debunked, exposing the lack of authenticity in their reporting.

As customary, Indian media outlets, accompanied by India-based social media users, inundated various platforms, including X and others, with news of Dawood Ibrahim's



'death' in Karachi. The narrative propagated that he had been rushed to the hospital after being poisoned. Screenshots, purportedly from the account of Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar, were circulated, claiming Dawood's demise. However, the media revealed that the screenshot was not from Kakar's account, rendering the news fake.

The sensational hype employed by Indian media, without attributing a single authentic or credible source, raised eyebrows. After the media investigation, it is reported that any confirmation regarding Dawood Ibrahim's health or alleged incident could not be verified. This incident underscores the typical approach of certain Indian media outlets, utilizing sensationalism without proper verification. The lack of adherence to journalistic standards was evident as the news lacked credibility and authenticity.

In an era where fact-checking is paramount, Indian media's reliance on decades-old propaganda has been exposed once again.

As new media platforms prioritize accuracy and accountability, instances like these contribute to a growing skepticism surrounding the credibility of certain sections of the Indian media. This exposure serves as a reminder of the importance of responsible journalism and fact-based reporting in the contemporary media landscape.

US continues to lead as top export destination; UAE-Dubai claims fourth spot

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In the ever-evolving landscape of Pakistan's international trade, the United States has maintained its stronghold as the nation's primary export destination in November FY24, as revealed by data released by the State Bank of Pakistan. Despite a 7.89% year-on-year decrease, Pakistan's exports to the United States reached \$435.14 million, emphasizing the resilience of economic ties between the two nations.

China secured the second-largest position, experiencing a significant 36.3% year-on-year increase. The export figures rose from \$199.06 million in the same period last year to \$271.32 million, underscoring the strengthening trade bonds between Pakistan and China.

The United Kingdom re-

tained its status as the third-largest export market, contributing \$172.94 million in export revenue. This reflected a positive growth of 7.15% compared to the previous year, highlighting the steadfastness of trade relations between Pakistan and the U.K.

In a noteworthy development, U.A.E. Dubai claimed the fourth spot as a major export destination, experiencing a substantial increase of 24.23% year-on-year. Pakistani exports to the region reached \$134.02 million, showcasing the growing economic engagement between the two nations.

Despite a 10.29% year-on-year drop in exports to Germany, amounting to \$125.11 million, exports to Spain saw a positive uptick of 3.32% year-on-year, reaching \$122.27 million. The Netherlands, however, witnessed a decline of

6.17% year-on-year, with export receipts standing at \$111.93 million.

Analyzing month-on-month fluctuations, November saw a 10.31% decrease in total exports to the U.S.A., mirroring a similar trend in exports to China, which dropped by 14.91% month-on-month. Conversely, exports to the U.K. experienced a modest increase of 1.35% month-on-month.

Cumulatively, in the first five months of FY24, the United States maintained its position as the leading source of export receipts for Pakistan, contributing a substantial \$2.3 billion. China closely followed, with a remarkable 39.44% increase in exports, totaling \$1.22 billion. The United Kingdom ranked third, contributing exports valued at \$862.4 million, showcasing the dynamic nature of Pakistan's international trade relations.

Balochistan CS vows full support to ECP for upcoming polls

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir affirmed unwavering support for the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for the upcoming General Elections 2024 during a meeting with the provincial election commissioner in Quetta on Monday.

Qadir assured the ECP of comprehensive assistance to ensure the transparent and efficient conduct of the general elections scheduled for February 8. Speaking on the preparations, he stated, "The arrangements have been completed to hold the general elections on February 8." He further emphasized that security and transport plans are actively in progress, aiming to facilitate a peaceful and orderly electoral process. The commitment from the chief secretary underscores the collective efforts to uphold the integrity of the democratic process in Balochistan.

Earlier, ECP Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja had assured a level playing field for all political parties, including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), in the upcoming elections. Addressing speculations, Raja clarified, "I had never said the elections would be delayed in the country. We have prepared the election schedule."

Raja also shed light on a significant meeting with the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP), stating, "Today I had a great meeting with the CJP." The details of the meeting were not disclosed, but it suggests high-level discussions and collaboration between key institutions to ensure the smooth conduct of the electoral process.

Rupee continues to muscle up against USD

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The Pakistani Rupee demonstrated further resilience on the first day of the business week, recording another substantial gain against the US Dollar in the interbank market. The Dollar depreciated by 26 paises, settling at Rs283. This ongoing trend highlights a consistent devaluation of the US Dollar against the Pakistani Rupee. Over the past week alone, the local currency appreciated by 61 paises, culminating in a settlement at Rs283.26 against the US Dollar in the interbank market.

Closing the business week on Friday, the Dollar experienced a drop of 36 paises in the interbank market, settling at Rs283.15. This marks the fifth consecutive week of the Rupee gaining strength against the Dollar, a trend attributed to the recent staff-level agreement between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The positive momentum extended to the stock market, where the KSE-100 Index witnessed a

bullish trend. Opening at 65,812 points, the index rose by an impressive 362 points, reflecting investor confidence.

In addition to the currency gains, the State Bank of Pakistan reported a notable boost in domestic foreign exchange reserves. On December 8, reserves surged by \$90.93 million, reaching a total of \$12.20 bil-



lion. Notably, the State Bank's reserves also increased by \$20.06 million, totaling \$7.4 billion. The positive shift in the exchange rate and the surge in foreign exchange reserves contribute to a favorable economic environment for Pakistan, fostering optimism and stability in the financial markets.

The consistent appreciation of the Rupee is seen as a positive indicator of economic resilience and prudent fiscal policies.

NADRA blocks NICs of 18 PTI leaders in May 9 cases

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has taken strict action by blocking the national identity cards (NICs) of 18 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders who were declared proclaimed offenders in the May 9 cases.

The list of blocked ID cards includes prominent figures such as Murad Saeed, Azam Swati, Hamid Azhar, Aslam Iqbal, Karamat Khokhar, Ali Amin Gandapur, Wasiq Qayyum Abbasi, Musarrat Jamshed Cheema, Jamshed Cheema, and others. According to NADRA officials, the process of blocking the identity cards was initiated at the request of the police. Police officials empha-

sized that the suspects cannot avail legal rights without appearing in the anti-terrorism court.

The national identity cards of the proclaimed offenders will remain blocked pending further investigation, stated NADRA officials. This action will result in the deprivation of all facilities associated with an ID card for the individuals involved, as per police officials.

The move by NADRA underscores the ongoing efforts to address legal implications related to the May 9 cases involving the aforementioned PTI leaders. The blocked ID cards reflect a step toward ensuring accountability and legal proceedings for individuals declared proclaimed offenders in these cases.

Groom succumbs to heart attack on wedding stage

News Desk

SIALKOT: A joyous wedding ceremony in Sialkot's Daska Tehsil took a tragic turn as the groom unexpectedly passed away on the stage before consummation of the event. The family, initially celebrating the occasion, was plunged into mourning as the groom collapsed during the ceremony.

The incident, captured in a video, shows the groom seated on a sofa surrounded by family members. Suddenly, he collapses forward, prompting immediate panic among those present. Family members rushed to his aid, lifting him and checking his pulse, but sadly, their efforts couldn't save him. According to the family members, the groom's untimely demise was attributed to a heart attack.

Meanwhile, the video circulating on social media depicts the shock and distress that ensued during what was supposed to be a day of celebration. Local authorities, including the police, were informed about the incident. However, it was reported that the groom's family declined any investigation into the sudden death, citing the heart attack as the cause. This tragic incident brings to light the unpredictability of life's events, turning moments of joy into unexpected sorrow.

Such occurrences serve as a stark reminder of the fragile nature of human existence, leaving the family and friends of the groom in deep sorrow.

This incident echoes a similar unfortunate situation from last year when a groom in Multan faced deception as his bride absconded with the money. Identified as Makhdoom Rasheed, the groom arrived for the wedding only to discover the bride and her family had disappeared, leaving him in a state of shock and financial loss.

Israeli forces hits hospital, casualties reported across Gaza

News Desk

GAZA/JERUSALEM: In a series of deadly attacks, Israeli forces launched airstrikes up and down the Gaza Strip on Sunday, targeting various locations, including a refugee camp in the north and a hospital in the south, resulting in numerous casualties, according to Palestinian officials, media reports, and eyewitnesses.

The Jabalia refugee camp in

northern Gaza witnessed severe devastation as Israeli strikes claimed the lives of 90 Palestinians on Sunday, as reported by Gaza's health ministry spokesman to the media. Another missile attack targeted a house belonging to the Shehab family, resulting in the death of 24 people, as stated by Hamas Aqsa radio. Among the casualties was the son of Dawoud Shehab according to an official from the group.

In central Gaza's Deir al-Balah, medics reported 12 Palestinians killed and dozens wounded, while a house in Rafah in the south was struck by an Israeli airstrike, resulting in at least four deaths. Residents rushed to the damaged building to rescue those trapped under the rubble, describing the sound of the explosion as "as powerful as an earthquake."

In Khan Younis, southern Gaza, the residents reported Is-

raeli forces bombing and claimed to have killed seven people in an air strike on Khan Younis, revealing the discovery of rocket manufacturing parts

to the already high toll of casualties, with approximately 19,000 Palestinians reported killed since October 7. Israeli officials state that 121 soldiers have been killed since the ground campaign began on October 27, involving tanks and in-

spokesman Ashraf Al-Qidra. Abu Mehzen had previously lost family members and one of her legs during an earlier shelling in the Al-Amal neighborhood.

The recent escalation adds to the already high toll of casualties, with approximately 19,000 Palestinians reported killed since October 7. Israeli officials state that 121 soldiers have been killed since the ground campaign began on October 27, involving tanks and in-

fantry pushing into Gaza's cities and refugee camps. Hopes for a ceasefire and hostage releases were raised on Saturday following reports of communication between Israel's spy chief and the prime minister of Qatar, a mediator in previous releases in exchange for ceasefires and the liberation of Palestinian prisoners. The situation remains tense, with ongoing military actions and a challenging humanitarian crisis.