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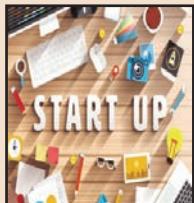
Desperate times,
desperate measures:
Bringing in dollars by all
means



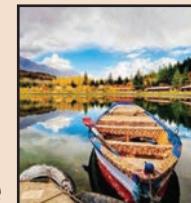
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Last year was brutal for
startups. This year might be
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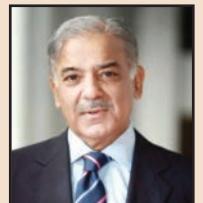


KP tourism department
fumbles funds



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PM reaffirms
importance
Pakistan attaches
to ties with Kuwait



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SBP RESERVES FALL TO \$4.5B AFTER RECENT DEBT REPAYMENTS

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

THE foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank hit a record low to \$4.5 billion on Saturday after Pakistan recently made repayments of over \$1 billion loans to two foreign commercial banks. The reserves of \$4.5 billion are hardly enough to finance 25 days of import.

Two separate repayments of \$600 million and \$415 million have been

made to two Dubai-based commercial banks, sources said on Saturday. After the loans repayments, Pakistan is left with less than 25 days of import cover.

It is pertinent to mention here that the economic activities in the country have already been severely affected due to depleting reserves, devaluation of local currency and non-opening of Letters of Credit (LCs) for private companies.

Major industries including car manufacturing companies have temporarily closed their plants due to import restrictions. However, efforts are on to help the

country regain the lost reserves.

Well-placed sources said that Pakistan is expecting to raise around \$1.5 to \$2 billion worth of funds in foreign aid during Geneva Conference to be held next week for the country's flood victims.

Besides, efforts are also underway to arrange loans from Saudi Arabia and China as army chief Gen Asim Munir is on a weeklong trip to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) to shore up assistance from the decades-old friendly countries.

It is expected that Pakistan and Inter-

national Monetary Fund (IMF) will hold discussion next week for the completion of the pending 9th review of the programme.

If the pending review is completed successfully, Pakistan will get a loan instalment of over \$1 billion from the IMF.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has also requested the IMF Managing Director to immediately send over a team to the country to start review negotiations for the next tranche of its loan.

While speaking at the inauguration of Hazara Electric Supply Company

(HAZECO) in Islamabad on Friday, the premier also confirmed that he had a telephonic conversation with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on Thursday.

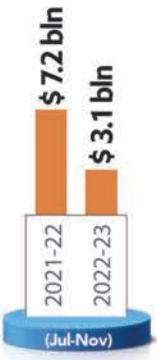
"I asked her to send an IMF team for the completion of the pending 9th review of the programme so that the next loan tranche is released," Shehbaz Sharif told the gathering while referring to his telephonic conversation with Georgieva a day earlier. "She assured that the mission will visit [Pakistan] in the next two to three days".

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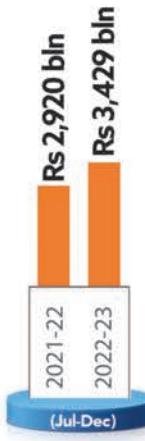
#KnowYourEconomy

REBUILDING PAKISTAN

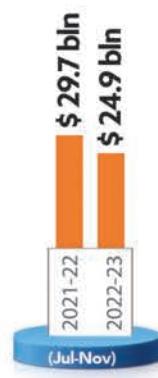
Current Account
Deficit Reduced
by 57%



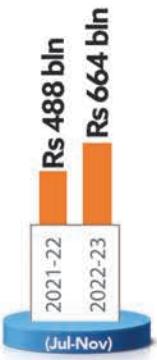
Revenue
Collection
Rs. 3429 Billion
17.4% Increase



Imports
Reduced
by 16.2%



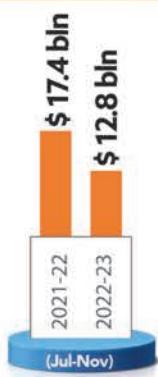
Agriculture
Credit
Rs. 664 Billion
36% Growth



BISP's portfolio
enhanced to
Rs. 364 Billion



Trade Deficit
Reduced
by 26%



Currency
Stabilized



Historic Kisan
Package of
Rs. 1800 Billion



Timely Payment
of External
Liabilities



Together we've averted default. Together we'll rebuild Pakistan.



Government
of Pakistan

IMRAN CLEARS ALL 'MISUNDERSTANDINGS' WITH MWM

LAHORE

STAFF REPORT

PAKISTAN Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan on Saturday announced that all misunderstandings with the Majlis Wadatul Muslimeen (MWM) were cleared, adding that the party "reiterated their commitment" to PTI's "struggle for Haqeeqi Azadi".

The former premier took to Twitter to state that he held a meeting with the leader of MWM Allama Raja Nasir and his

delegation on Friday.

Imran added that he assured the MWM members that he would resolve any problems the party may face in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) and Punjab.

The meeting between the two party leaders comes as MWM announced earlier this week that it would not give a vote of confidence to Punjab Chief Minister and PTI ally Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi.

In a statement released by the party, the MWM Political Council said that it took the decision after consultation with its leadership.

According to the party

spokesperson, the MWM expressed "serious concerns over some of Elahi's actions" and said that its member of the Punjab Assembly Syeda Zahra Naqvi would not give him a vote of confidence.

In a bid to stop the dissolution of the Punjab Assembly on Dec 23, 2022, as announced by Imran, Governor Balighur Rehman asked Elahi to take a vote of confidence two days ahead of the deadline.

However, Speaker Sibat Khan intervened and stated that it could not happen as the Punjab Assembly was in session and calling a new one would be

unconstitutional.

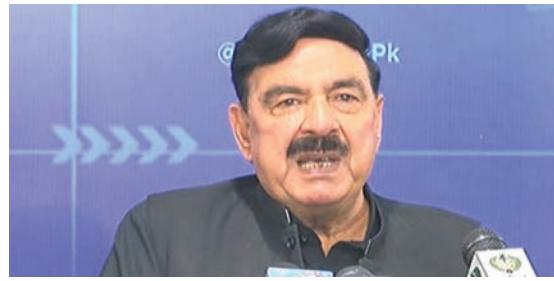
Subsequently, the governor de-notified Elahi on Dec 22, 2022. However, the Lahore High Court (LHC) reinstated the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) leader on the assurance that he would not dissolve the assembly before Jan 11, 2023 – the next date of hearing.

A day after the LHC reinstated Elahi, PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry said that the party would ask Elahi to take a vote of confidence as soon as possible.

It is pertinent to note that earlier the MWM announced unconditional support to the former ruling party for



the local government election in Islamabad. It hoped that residents of the federal capital would vote for the PTI to defeat the ruling coalition.



Next 100 days crucial for politics, Rasheed predicts

RAWALPINDI

STAFF REPORT

Awami Muslim League (AML) chairman Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed said on Saturday that three months were crucial for politics as the country is facing economic and political challenges. In a tweet, the former interior minister lamented poor people were struggling to meet the ends but the "77 ministers" were enjoying their rule of the country. Taking a dig at the government's efforts to revive the loan programme of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), he said the government was ready to become a slave of the global lender. "No one can give the competition to the government in the art of begging," he added. Ahmed said the rulers had made Ishaq Dar finance minister instead of bringing their looted wealth parked in foreign countries back to Pakistan. Talking about the political situation in Punjab, he said foreign minister Imran Khan would take the decision of dissolving the assemblies or quitting them but asserted, "Election will take place at any cost," he said.

Zardari takes notice of accusation of blasphemy

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

President Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari has taken strict notice of the incident that took place at Karachi Airport involving a female security in-charge. Asif Zardari said that it is shameful to accuse the female security personnel of blasphemy to prevent her from performing her duties, said a press release issued by the Party Secretariat. He said that the accusation of blasphemy against the female security in-charge should be investigated. Accusing someone of blasphemy is a very serious matter. Asif Zardari directed the federal and provincial governments to protect the female security officer and measures should be taken in this regard. He said some elements want to defame Pakistan under the guise of religion, President Zardari said. The government and the people should discourage such behaviour of accusing innocent people. If the accusation against the female security officer is proved false, the accuser should be severely punished, he said.

PML-N's Abbasi describes amend to Amy Act 1952 as 'mistake'

ISLAMABAD

NEWS DESK



make that decision.

Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi Saturday termed the amendment to Army Act 1952, to granting former chief of army staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa a three-year extension, in January 2020 a "mistake," elaborating the amendment needed to be repealed.

"It is my personal opinion since day one that the amendment was a mistake and should be undone," Shahid Khaqan Abbasi stated during an interview on Dawn News 'Doosra Rukh.'

He stressed that extension was an extraordinary act and should not be made into a routine act. "The country's prime minister (at the time Imran Khan) — without taking advice — gave the extension in August [2019], three and a half months before [Bajwa's scheduled retirement]."

He elaborated that the "mistake was the amendment in the law" after granting the extension.

The former prime minister claimed that the decision should have been made in November 2019 but Imran "rushed" to

make that decision.

He claimed that the "army's institution itself would call for it to be repealed". Abbasi also said that Imran and retired Gen Bajwa "should sit together and decide who has stabbed whom", adding that there is "no need to stab [anyone]". He opined, "Neither was it Bajwa Sahab's duty to play politics in the country nor was it Imran Khan Sahab's duty to play with him. If you would play, then, of course, the [resulting] situations of that play would be what are [the country's] today."

Former prime minister Imran Khan had previously extended Gen Bajwa's tenure through a notification in August 2019, but the top court suspended it on Nov 26, 2019 due to irregularities in the

manner of extension.

In a rare show of agreement, the government and the opposition reached a consensus in January 2020 over the proposed amendments to the Pakistan Army Act after the federal cabinet had approved them.

The Senate then bulldozed the Pakistan Army (Amendment) Bill 2020 on Jan 8, 2020 along with two other bills, making the COAS's extension a part of the law.

In a series of criticisms of the former COAS, Imran in December 2022 termed his decision as a "big mistake".

ON CM ELAHI, MQM Factions: In his interview to be aired today, Abbasi also spoke about Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi's impending vote of confidence.

When asked if any members of opposing parties were brought to their side for the expected vote of confidence, the PML-N leader responded: "I don't know if he (Elahi) will pass the vote of confidence or not [as] he didn't come through voting [but] with a court's order, which was quite ambiguous".

Regarding the PTI's aim to dissolve

the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies, he said the "assembly can only be dissolved by the person who has the assembly's majority [and] trust".

Responding to another question, Abbasi said that the union of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement's (MQM) factions — MQM-Pakistan (also known as MQM) and Mohajir Qaumi Movement-Haqiqi (MQM-H) — was up for debate depending on the underlying cause of it.

"If they are being unified with an underlying purpose, then that is not right. If they are uniting on their own, it is a good thing." The former prime minister also demanded that a truth commission be constituted on the PTI's Faizabad protest.

He asserted that the federal government was "managing" the situation but the "court ordered the Punjab inspector general — not the government — that he has to take action and dispel the protest within two days".

He asked why police security consisting of "six to eight to 10 thousand" personnel failed to dispel mere 200 PTI protesters.

NAB summons Zulfi Bukhari in Al-Qadir University land case

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and former special assistant to the prime minister on overseas Pakistanis and human resource development Zulfi Bukhari Saturday received a notice from the National Accountability Bureau's (NAB) Rawalpindi office — summoning him on January 9.

He has been summoned in a matter related to land transfer and purchase of a university in Punjab. The anti-graft body has summoned Bukhari along with the land transfer record of Al-Qadir University Project Trust, the notice stated.

NAB has, as per the notice, also asked him to seek a registry record of purchasing land from a private housing society. Reacting to being summoned by the corruption watchdog, the PTI leader said that NAB has called him as a witness. "This is a revenge tactic.

I will not back down in any case," Bukhari said, highlighting how he's being framed on purpose.

"An attempt is being made to frame me as a criminal for [initiating] a university which is playing its role for Islamic education," the PTI politician said, adding that he's ready to face any tactic by the government.

Reiterating the stance of his party's leader Imran Khan, Bukhari insisted on elections as the only solution to problems in Pakistan.

Last month, The News reported that the PTI chief's dream university, Al-Qadir Institute, has only enrolled 100 students even two years after its establishment.

The former prime minister's varsity — established in 2021 in Sohawa, Jhelum — has still not been recognised as a university by the Punjab government. In its first year, Al-Qadir offered admission to 41 students, while in the second year, only 60 students were enrolled by it.

Court issues order on unfreezing Dar's assets, bank account

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

An

Accountability Court on Saturday issued a written order regarding release of assets and bank accounts of Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

The court also withdrew 2017 order, under which the minister's assets had been confiscated. Ishaq Dar's assets and bank accounts had been seized after he was declared a proclaimed offender in a case. The order also stated that Dar's trial has also ended due to lack of jurisdiction of the accountability court. Earlier, Lahore administration on December 29 restored the frozen assets of the minister, on the orders of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). Dar had once again retained proprietorship of his property — Hajvery House — in Lahore's Gulberg area. Lahore administration had also written a letter to all banks for the restoration of minister's frozen bank accounts.

PTI agreement with IMF sandwich Pakistan between devil, deep sea: Sanaullah

FAISALABAD

STAFF REPORT

Federal Interior Minister Rana Sana Ullah Khan Saturday claimed that the PTI commitments with International Monetary Fund (IMF) had sandwiched Pakistan between the devil and deep sea, however, the present government was trying its optimum best to control the situation due to harsh conditions of the IMF.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of a new NADRA Center near Painsara on Jhang Road here on Saturday evening, he said that the PTI government first inked documents with IMF and then backed out from its commitments which landed Pakistan into a very alarming situation.

"If present government tries to fulfill the harsh conditions of IMF, it jacks up the inflation and price spiral coupled with economic set back. If we back out from these conditionalities, then our economic survival

will become next to impossible and even our friendly countries cannot extend financial help to us," he added. He said that some elements were intentionally creating uncertainty for their ulterior political motives. Their propaganda was practically double-edged sword as they wanted to create problems for the sitting government in addition to pushing Pakistan towards bankruptcy.

However, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif along with his economic team is making sincere efforts to overcome this situation and hopefully the people will hear a good news very soon near future," he added.

He said that during the period of Nawaz Sharif, the growth rate was as high as 6.2 per cent. Dollar was stable at Rs 105. Similarly the prices of electricity and gas were stable and affordable for the common people. He said that at that time the global economic analysts were optimistic that Pakistan was progressing satisfactorily but an incompetent person was clamped on Pakistan who reversed the economic gains of the

PMLN government.

The minister said that the only objective of this incompetent person was to malign the opposition and he was fully involved in political engineering. During his tenure, false and unfounded cases were instituted against his political opponents but not even a single case was proved in the court of law.

Without naming Imran Khan, the minister termed him as an absolute liar and said, "He was blaming that I have murdered 20 people. He was enjoying full powers in federal and provincial governments. He was in a position to prove myself guilty of these allegations but he used it just as a tool of political maligning and hence he was forced to get registered yet another false heroin case against me".

"This person is hoodwinking the masses especially the youth. He is promoting culture of abusive language, hate and obscenity. The people must reject him with their vote power as the country may face any mishap if

he usurped the power again through illegal means", the minister added.

Rana Sana Ullah said that Wazirabad attack was a personal deed of a person who was apprehended then and there and he also confessed the crime but PTI was making false propaganda of three culprits only to keep this case alive for their political maneuvering.

He said that a NADRA Center had been established in Painsara while he was trying to setup other centers in Aminpur Bungalow and Ramdewali Sargodha Road besides increasing 3-4 times capacity of Main Centre Faisalabad to facilitate the people.

He said that identity card was the basic need of every individual and this facility would be provided to them at their doorstep.

He said that he was also working on plan to establish desks of Passport Office in NADRA Centers so that people could get this facility in a hustle-free environment.

PML-N CHALLENGES HELICOPTER LAW IN PHC

PESHAWAR

STAFF REPORT

THE Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has challenged the Aircraft, Helicopter bill approved by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Assembly in Peshawar High Court.

The bill regarding the use of government-owned helicopters has been challenged in court by MPA Sardar Yousuf, PML-N parliamentary leader in the KP Assembly. The provincial government and

chief secretary were made respondents in the petition.

The TLTP learnt that the PTI KP government recently passed a legislative bill in the provincial legislature to allow the use of aircraft or helicopters by the functionaries of the government at public expense for personal gains.

Similarly, the legislation empowers the chief minister to allow any minister, advisor or special assistant to chief minister, public servant or government servant to utilize the facility at public

expense.

The bill was passed amid serious controversy and opposition protest. The opposition contended that the law would allow everyone to use aircraft, and helicopter at public expense like a cab or rickshaw.

Sardar Yousuf argued that the amendment to the laws was made illegally. No one, including Imran Khan, would be allowed to use public money, he said, adding that the bill was approved as the PTI was in majority in the provincial

assembly.

He contended that any legislation with retrospective implementation is unconstitutional and in the case of the Aircraft, Helicopter bill since it was drafted for providing protection to PTI Chairman Imran Khan and his several cronies for callously using KP government's helicopter for several years despite any legal authority and entitlement.

He argued that the provincial government had provided legal shelter to the use of provincial government-owned

helicopters since 208 through the bill. He said it had also allowed renting out the helicopter for commercial use.

The petitioner pleaded with the court to declare the law null and void.

Pertinent to mention Last month, KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali signed the bill despite having reservations on it. He also wrote a dissenting note, saying he was not satisfied with the bill. He is of the view that the bill was approved by the PTI-led provincial government just to protect the past use of the helicopters by Imran Khan.

Daily official wheat quota for flour mills doubled

LAHORE:

APP

Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi said on Saturday that daily official quota of wheat for flour mills had been doubled. According to official sources here, decisions were taken to tackle wheat and flour related issue during a meeting presided over by Punjab CM. CM said that sale points had also been doubled across the province. He said that 1840000 bags of 10 kg flour would be available on daily basis in Punjab at government rate. Parvez Elahi said that from Monday 26,000 tons of wheat would be released to flour mills more than their demand. Increase of government wheat quota would reduce prices of private wheat and flour reasonably, he added. Food Secretary Nadir Chattha attended the meeting.

Balochistan hospital nurse reveals sexual harassment scandal with staff

QUETTA

STAFF REPORT

A nurse from Sheikh Zayed Hospital on Friday accused the administration of blackmailing and sexual harassment to female nurse staff. The provincial authorities and police received an anonymous letter from the affected nurse of Sheikh Zayed Hospital. The letter states that nurses and other female staff in Sheikh Zayed Hospital are forced to solicit by a powerful group. The alleged victim revealed in the letter that those staffers who do not obey them are subjected to oppression, moreover all the facilities are given to those who followed the instructions given by the influential group. She further exposed the gang and stated that the staff nurses are being blackmailed through immoral pictures, meanwhile the victim did not reveal her name due to the threat from this group.

LHC to take up Imran disqualification case today

LAHORE

STAFF REPORT

The Lahore High Court (LHC) has fixed Imran Khan's disqualification case for hearing. A 3-member bench headed by Chief Justice Mohammad Amir Bhatti will hold the hearing on January 9. The larger bench includes Justice Abid Aziz Sheikh and Justice Sajid Mahmood Sethi. The Registrar's Office has released the cause list regarding the hearing of the case. A larger bench headed by the Chief Justice will hear two different petitions related to Imran Khan's disqualification. Justice Sajid Mahmood Sethi recommended the formation of a larger bench on the petitions related to Imran Khan's disqualification. Advocate Afaq Ahmed has approached the High Court to remove Imran Khan from the post of PTI chief. Citizen Jaber Abbas Khan has challenged the disqualification of Imran Khan from Mianwali constituency in the Toshakhana case.

PTI holds seminar in Peshawar against rising terrorism today

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) would organize a national seminar in Peshawar on Sunday (today) against the reemergence of the menace of terrorism in the country especially in the merged districts of KP mainly due to the imported government's failed foreign and Afghan policies.

According to the detail, the PTI Chairman Imran Khan would be the keynote speaker in the seminar, which would also be addressed by experts on terrorism and Pak-Afghan affairs.

Allied religious and political parties, elders of terrorism-affected areas and people from various walks of life would participate in large numbers in the seminar. Media representatives would be



specially invited to the seminar.

PTI central leader Murad Saeed would complete the arrangements for the national seminar against terrorism as an organizer.

During the seminar, the PTI leaders would highlight its government's successful policies that helped establish peace in the country.

The PDM government not only ruined the well-performing economy of the country but also destroyed the hard-won peace in the country in short span of few months rule.

PTI decided to raise voice for the security of people's lives and property.

During the seminar, the imported government's failed foreign and Afghan policies would be highlighted, besides analyzing the strategy to protect Pakistan from the negative consequences of the changing situation in Afghanistan's threadbare.

All proceedings of the seminar, including the address of Chairman PTI would be broadcast live on media and social media.

Paucity of medicines, surgical instruments leading country to health crisis: Ex-ICCI president

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Dr Shahid Rasheed Butt has said there is a shortage of raw materials and medical equipment used in the manufacturing of medicine, which is resulting in a major health crisis in the country.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, he said that there was also a shortage of items used in laboratory tests, surgical instruments and other items resulting in problems.

Shahid Rasheed Butt said that there has been a shortage of all kinds of

medical equipment including life-saving drugs in the country, but the authorities are not ready to do anything in this regard.

The government has announced the opening of letters of credit but according to the importers of the medical equipment, their LCs are not being opened resulting in a countrywide shortage, he added.

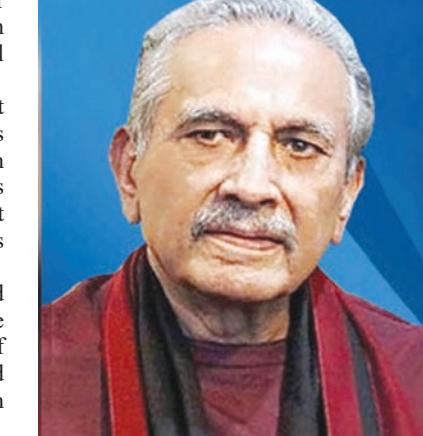
The business leader said that shortage of medicines in the local market has been going on for several months but now the situation is becoming alarming and no practical steps have been taken.

He said that another reason for the

shortage of medicines was the poor system of regulating their prices which has remained a highly controversial issue.

Shahid Rasheed said that the last date for registration of medicines was December 31, 2022, in which an extension of at least three months was necessary so that precious lives were not lost due to a shortage of imported drugs and equipment.

The government should immediately end the delay in the issuance of LCs for the import of medical raw materials, chemicals and instruments to save the country from another serious crisis, he demanded.



Last year was brutal for startups: This year might be even more so

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

Later on, mobility startup SWVL also shut operations in Pakistan. Other startups that shut down operations are VavaCars and CarFirst.

The global funding crunch was the common denominator behind these startups shutting down.

The federal reserve in the US started aggressively increasing interest rates to fight inflation at home, prompting investors to move money to safer pastures. Diversion of investments towards less risky avenues has had investors question business fundamentals of startups and bid on startups that have the ability to turn profitability. Startups, however, were earlier encouraged by the same investors to generate higher valuation at the cost of sustainability. The shift in sentiment of investors sent startups

scrambling, requiring founders to adjust their models to become profitable and in turn sustainable.

However, not all startups had tested their sustainability in the absence of VC funding and when funding ran low, startups either had to choose to scale down rapidly or shut down altogether.

The global investment scene in the world took a further hit because of the Ukraine war. For Pakistan, the situation has been worse since this kind of frontier market is not a priority market for foreign investors. Moreover, local investors are not rich enough to support startups' growth ambitions on their own.

Over the past couple of years, startups have done very well for themselves. To list a few of their achievements; the startup ecosystem in Pakistan had managed to raise record amounts of funding

in 2021, put Pakistan on the radar of major foreign investors, capture the imaginations of the nation, secured high valuations and curate a workforce composed of young, driven, and talented individuals who would become problem solvers in the future.

However, rising inflation, a global recession and a major military conflict have pushed the dizzying highs experienced by tech-startups in Pakistan towards abysmal lows. But despite these troubles, corporations, investors, and other stakeholders still expressed support and showed confidence in Pakistan's startup potential, according to the i2i.

"This was seen through a wave of collaborations on various fronts – both local and international. More broadly, this sheds light on how far the ecosystem has progressed since its nascent nearly a decade ago," the report noted.

The question now is what 2023 will look like. The i2i report shows that the world will be moving towards a global recession as global interest rates will remain relatively high for most part of the year.

"The startup ecosystem will see more pain than in 2022, as many startups will run out of capital with no incremental funding in sight most likely before Q2 2024. Those that survive will be the funnel for the next investment cycle," said Faisal Aftab, co-founder and managing director, Zayn Capital.

So 2023 is going to be tougher for startups and Pakistan should expect more startup casualties because of the funding crunch and macroeconomic doom at home. Advice for startups remains the same: Focus on increasing runway as much as possible while improving unit economics.

Action against accused of Sopore massacre yet awaited

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

Despite the passage of three decades of Sopore massacre, none of the perpetrators from 94th Battalion of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) have been held accountable for martyring 46 civilians and injuring dozens more.

Forum for Kashmir (LKF) launches an archival study based report titled, "Slaughter in Sopore" to commemorate 30th anniversary of the heinous Sopore Massacre carried out by India's Occupying Forces, said a press release issued on Saturday.

The fact finding probe originally compiled by Institute

of Kashmir studies, IKS is eye-opener to the world that India and its occupying forces have a history of perpetrating war crimes and crimes against humanity in IIOJK.

On the morning of January 6, 1993, Indian Occupying Forces of 94 Battalion, Border Security Force (94 Bn. BSF), led by Commanding Officer S. Thangappan, shot and killed 46 people and injured dozens more.

In connection with the carnage at Sopore, the following facts about State terrorism have been brought to light by local and international human rights organizations:

(a) State terrorism seems to have crossed all limits when you find such persons among the victims whose age

is more than 55 years. The victims include an insane and sick man and a lady traveling in a bus.

b) State terrorism has not spared even the State government employees. In the list of victims, most of the victims are government employees.

(c) Fourteen passengers traveling in the RTC bus JK 1901, were killed mercilessly on the spot inside the bus. This is clearly an example of state terrorism. There is hardly any parallel to such brutalities.

(d) Most of the killed and injured persons comprise the victims who were busy in shops or at other business establishments or were out attending to their job. These victims were all civilians engaged in earning their day-

today livelihood.

(e) It also reveals the extreme level of degradation to which the Indian force has fallen when one finds at least four such victims who were shot at point-blank range and then thrown into the burning fire. Does humanity in the world find such an example elsewhere also?

(f) The State terrorism is so unsparing that even the state's police personnel are not safe, One Mr. Mushtaq Ahmad Shah, s/o Ghulam Ahmad Shah, r/o Trehgam Kupwara, posted at Police Station Sopore, who, while on his duty of collecting the dead bodies of the victims of the state terror, was shot at, though he had a narrow escape and was only injured in the face.

PAKISTAN TO CO-CHAIR UN CLIMATE CONFERENCE NEXT WEEK

GENEVA/ISLAMABAD
ANADOLU AGENCY

PRIME Minister Shehbaz Sharif will co-host together with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres the International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan in Geneva on January 9, according to the Foreign Office.

"The conference will serve as a platform to marshal international support for the people and government of Pakistan to build back better in a resilient manner after the recent devastating floods as the country transitions from the rescue-and-relief phase towards the monumental task of recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction," the Foreign Office said in a statement.

Pakistan will present the Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework (4RF) at the conference and seek international support and long-term partnerships for its imple-



mentation, it said.

The 4RF document outlines a prioritised and sequential plan defined at the federal and provincial levels and includes the financial mechanism and institutional arrangements for its execution in an open, transparent and collaborative manner.

The conference program will feature a high-level opening segment to be co-chaired by the prime minister and UN Secretary-General followed by the official launch of the 4RF document and partner support announcements.

Heads of state and government, min-

isters and high-level representatives from several countries and international financial institutions, foundations and funds as well as from international development organisations, the private sector, civil society and international non-governmental organisations are expected to participate in the conference, according to the statement.

Torrential rains and devastating floods have left a third of Pakistan under water aside from killing nearly 1,700 people since mid-June last year.

Over 33 million people, mainly in Sindh and Balochistan, were hit by the biblical floods, with hundreds of thousands of homes, buildings, bridges, schools and roads washed away.

A post-disaster needs assessment conducted by the government and development partners, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), estimated that total damage and losses are at more than \$30 billion and recovery and reconstruction needs are at \$16.3 billion.

PM expresses grief at death of civil servant

ISLAMABAD
MONITORING REPORT

Shehbaz Sharif Saturday expressed grief over the death of retired Capt. Sher Alam Mahsud, a BPS-22 officer of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) and secretary for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan. The prime minister expressed his sympathies with the bereaved family and prayed for the elevation of his ranks, his office said in a press statement. He said Mahsud was among the finest members of the bureaucracy. With his death, the civil service has lost a competent officer, he added.

Punjab introduces new policy for local purchase of medicines

ISLAMABAD: Punjab Health Minister Dr. Yasmin Rashid has said that the Department of Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education Punjab has introduced a new policy on local purchase of medicines. In a statement issued here on Saturday, she said the new policy would set a new standard of transparency in the health department. She said that Secretary Health Punjab Dr. Ahmed Javed Qazi and his team deserved congratulations. She said the new policy of local purchase would increase the trend of competition. She said that the provision of free medicines to patients would be improved. She said the entire system had been computerised under the new policy. She said that providing free and quality medicines to patients in hospitals was the top priority of the government. STAFF REPORT



Teen shot dead in Karachi

KARACHI
STAFF REPORT

A young man shot dead a teenage classmate inside an educational institute in the Gulshan-i-Iqbal neighbourhood of Karachi, police and witnesses said.

Ahsan Akhtar, 19, was killed in a coaching centre in Block 13-D near Madina Masjid. Gulshan-i-Iqbal station house officer (SHO) Arshad Janjua said a scuffle broke

out between two groups but the administration intervened and pacified them. However, on Friday, the suspect, whose identity was not disclosed by the police, armed with a Kalashnikov rifle entered the premises and opened fire at Akhtar before fleeing.

Akhtar suffered a bullet wound in the chest and was transported to a nearby hospital where he passed away during treatment.

There was no further explana-

tion for how a young man acquired the weapon. Police described it as an "altercation" in the classroom that resulted in a shot fired.

Some witnesses told the press the suspect entered the weapon was hidden in a sack.

Janjua said the incident appeared to be an outcome of a personal grudge, without elaborating further. He claimed the alleged killer had been identified and police were out to arrest him.

CTD arrests five alleged terrorists during 21 IBOs across Punjab

LAHORE
STAFF REPORT

The Punjab Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) on Saturday claimed to have nailed five alleged terrorists during 21 intelligence-based operations carried out in various districts of the province. According to a spokesperson for the CTD on Saturday, the alleged terrorists — arrested after interrogating 22 suspects — were identified as Inamul Haque, Maskeenullah, Wahid Khan, Sher Naqib and Shah Wali.

He added that they belonged to different outlawed religious organizations, including the proscribed militant group Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan.

The CTD statement said the terrorists had "planned to sabotage the province and wanted to target important installations and other religious places".

The spokesperson said that weapons and explosives were recovered from the arrested suspects — including an improvised explosive device bomb, half a kilogramme of explosive material, 0.6 metres of safety fuse wire, 1.8m primacord, two hand grenades and two detonators.

Other electric items were seized as well, including an electric circuit, an electric button, 0.9m of electric wire and a battery. Five books and a receipt book of a banned organisation, two mobile phones, and cash worth Rs17,230 were also taken into custody, the statement added.



The CTD statement highlighted that the department had conducted a total of 526 combing operations this week with the help of local police and security agencies. During these operations, it performed security checks of 21,227 suspicious people, arrested 130 suspects, filed 82 first information reports and made 27 recoveries.

"The Punjab CTD is diligently pursuing its goal of a safe Punjab and no stone will be left unturned in its efforts to bring terrorists and anti-state elements behind bars," the spokesperson said.

The development comes a week after the Punjab CTD claimed to have arrested five suspected militants during intelligence-based operations across the province. The CTD claimed to have conducted 24 IBOs in different districts of the province to effectively counter the menace of terrorism.

Sharif administration unsure flood aid conference to translate into funds

ISLAMABAD
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Members of the government were increasingly concerned whether next week's UN-backed conference will succeed in raising the billions of dollars needed to help survivors and launch reconstruction efforts following last summer's devastating floods.

Authorities say they need \$16.3 billion, half of which will be financed from the budget. The government seeks the other half — about \$8 billion — in aid donations from the international community.

The United Nations and Pakistan are jointly hosting the conference on Monday in

Geneva, which had earlier been billed as a donors conference. However, as expectations of large influxes faltered, the government now says the day-long event will be used to raise the alarm about the situation in the aftermath of the deadly deluge.

Those wanting to announce pledges at the event would be welcome, said Khalil Hashmi, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN. He spoke at a news conference in Geneva alongside Knut Ostby, United Nations Development Program's representative in Pakistan.

The Geneva event aims to foster "solidarity" and support for the victims of the floods that killed 1,739 people and affected

33 million Pakistanis, Hashmi added.

"This is a pivotal moment for the global communities to stand with the people of Pakistan," said Ostby.

He added hopes that the conference will mobilize the international community to support a resilient recovery from the devastating floods, which also displaced eight million people, damaged two million houses and washed away 13,000 kilometres of roads. At one point, a third of the country was submerged.

Earlier on Thursday, Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, spokesperson of the Foreign Office, said Pakistan suffered more than \$30 billion in damages in the unprecedented

flooding, according to an UN-supported assessment document.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric has announced that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will take part in Monday's conference. He told reporters that Guterres "will call for support to strengthen the resilience of the communities in Pakistan for the future."

The UN has warned that the funding raised so far for Pakistan's flood victims will run out this month. The world body has so far received only a third of the \$816 million in emergency aid it sought last October for food, medicines and other supplies.

Pakistan, which plays a negligible role in global warming and emits less than one



Court extends protective bail of prime minister's son in money laundering probe

LAHORE
STAFF REPORT

A special court in Lahore on Saturday approved an extension in protective bail of Suleman Shahbaz, the son of the prime minister, in a case of money laundering registered against members of the Sharif family.

After four years in London in self-imposed exile, Shahbaz, one of the two sons of Shahbaz Sharif, returned home in December "to face investigation" in the money laundering case which began in 2018, his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party said. The Rs16 billion money laundering scandal involving members of his family, including the prime minister, is being probed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) while the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has nominated him in a separate wealth reference.

He has been declared a proclaimed offender in both investigations.

Shehbaz appeared before the court on Saturday after his bail expired. His lawyer informed the judge that he had joined the investigation in the case. At this, the judge extended the bail period until January 21 while directing the investigation officer to submit a report in the next hearing.

Late last month, the high court barred the two agencies from arresting him in the wealth reference while hearing his petition for protective bail to enable him to surrender before a trial court.

The money laundering reference mainly accused Sharif of being a beneficiary of assets held in the name of his family members and benamidars, who had no sources to acquire such assets.

It said the members and benamidars of his family received fake foreign remittances of billions in their personal bank accounts. In addition to these remittances, the bureau said, billions of rupees were laundered by way of foreign pay orders, which were deposited in the personal bank accounts of Sharif's two sons.

The reference further said the Sharif family failed to justify the sources of funds used for the acquisition of assets.

It claimed the suspects committed offences of corruption and corrupt practices as envisaged under the provisions of the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999, and money laundering as delineated in the Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2010.

The agency has also asked a trial court to try the suspects and punish them under the law. Sharif and his other son, Hamza Shahbaz, were acquitted of the charges by a court in October but Shahbaz could not be tried after he fled to London in 2018.

percent of heat-trapping carbon dioxide, is still vulnerable to climate-induced devastation, experts say. Even before the heavy monsoon rains struck in mid-June, cash-strapped Pakistan was facing a serious financial crisis.

The nation also struggles with militant violence. On Thursday, security forces raided a militant hideout in a former Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) stronghold near the border with Afghanistan, triggering a shootout that killed 11 militants, the military said.

The raid in South Waziristan, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, also killed a militant commander, Hafiz Ullah, the military said.

IGP AKBAR KHAN TOOK KEY STEPS TO IMPROVE CAPITAL'S SECURITY SITUATION, FACILITATE COPS

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

AFTER taking over charge Inspector General Police (IGP) Islamabad, Dr. Akbar Khan dealt the prevailing law and order situation in Islamabad with utmost strategy and ensured effective security of the city, while taking several new steps for the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICP) Police Force.

Similarly, the Safe City Project was restructured and the IGP Islamabad took 45 important steps in a short time of his posting, the biggest of which is regarding the welfare of the force, in which Rs 1.24 billion was released towards payment of arrears of martyrs and em-

ployees who died during service.

Rs 17.5 million was distributed for the welfare of the martyrs and the families of the deceased and other police personnel. The recruitment of the families of the martyrs has been completed and no case is pending.

Salaries, daily and ration allowances of 9,500 police personnel have been increased. From IG to Sepoy, 30 officers were awarded gallantry awards. Five SPs were promoted on temporary basis, 11 inspectors, 28 sub-inspectors to the next posts. Pakistan's first Capital Police Hospital was approved at a total cost of Rs 5.864 billion. E-health system was introduced to provide better health facilities to the employees.

Efforts are on to implement the promise of sanc-

tioning police law and order and executive allowance. In addition, 500 new cameras have been installed through the Safe City Project, after which the number has increased from 1900 to 2400. Islamabad Capital Police e-paper was published daily. The Police Order 2002 was implemented. 1010 law and order situation including May 5, 2022 was handled professionally without any untoward incident.

The emergency response time on Call 15 improved by 8 minutes. Response time and eagle squad were improved. Inter-provincial criminal Bilal Thabit Gang and his accomplices were eliminated. The Long March was handled professionally and peacefully. The investigation system was improved and the SHO's office was genuinely and practically

empowered in the light of the laws of the land.

The Capital Investigation Branch was reconstituted within the police stations for better prevention of crime. In order to improve the criminal system, the Court Compliance Unit (CCU) was set up to implement the court orders.

Gender Crime Unit was established in all police stations to combat gender crimes.

Electronic appearance of the accused in the cases pending in the court was ensured so that precious time of honorable court and judicial security could be saved. A robbery and robbery unit was established to improve the conviction rate and eliminate criminals. Women investigating officers were deployed in 10 police stations to improve the investigation.

Search underway for woman who drowned at Karachi beach

KARACHI

INP

Rescue teams were searching for the body of a young woman who reportedly drowned at Sea View beach on Friday, and the police said the incident is under investigation. The police said it was to be seen whether it's a case of death by suicide or an incident. The police said the search was stopped late on Friday as it was too dark. It resumed Saturday morning in the presence of an uncle from the woman's family. Police were able to reach the family through documents present in her wallet found at Do Darya. "We are investigating whether the girl died by suicide or something else," the police said.

Suspected TTP militants arrested

LAHORE

STAFF REPORT

Gujranwala and Sahiwal were saved from major destruction after five Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters were arrested during intelligence-based offensives on Saturday, the police said. The counter-terrorism department (CTD) of Punjab police revealed the development, identifying the detainees as Inam ul-Haq, Maskeen Ullah, Wahid Khan, Sher Naqeeb and Shah Wali. The CTD officials said explosive material, weapons and suicide vests have also been recovered from their possession. Several cases have been registered against the suspects and they were shifted to an undisclosed location for interrogation, they added. On the direction of the chief of Punjab police, 526 such operations have been conducted during the outgoing week in which 130 suspects have so far been arrested and 21,227 quizzed.

SBP reserves fall to \$4.5b after recent debt repayments

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

However, the finance ministry sources said no dates for the IMF review mission had been finalised yet. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar would leave for Geneva along with PM Shehbaz and meet IMF officials on the sidelines of a conference there. The conference has now been lowered to a climate resilience event from a donors' conference because of lack of interest by major players. The premier's direct intervention in the IMF programme talks suggests that the matters have slipped out of the hands of the finance ministry. The 9th review talks have been pending since October last year, resulting in the withholding of a \$1.1 billion loan tranche. Pakistan is keen to complete the 9th review so that the World Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) may also release their loans.

Islamabad LG polls: PTI withdraws plea against ECP

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Saturday withdrew a petition against the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for failing to conduct local government (LG) elections in Islamabad despite the high court's order.

A contempt of court petition was

filed against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja and members of the electoral watchdog by PTI and JI over failure to hold LG polls. The IHC registrar had raised objections over PTI's petition against the head of a constitutional institution.

On Dec 30, the Islamabad high court (IHC) ordered to hold local government (LG) elections in the federal

capital on December 31.

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Wednesday issued a written verdict on the intra-court appeals against the ruling of a single-bench on Islamabad LG polls. The IHC Chief Justice Amir Farooq issued the written verdict on the intra-court appeals filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the federal government.

The written verdict stated that the petitioner said there was not much time to implement the ruling of a single bench.

The court issued notices to the respondents at the next hearing. The two-member bench of IHC also accepted the ECP plea to submit more documents and adjourned the hearing till January 9.

Desperate times, desperate measures: Bringing in dollars by all means

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

Since May 1999, Pakistan has been following a market-based flexible exchange rate system. As a result, the interbank rate is applicable to all foreign exchange receipts and payments. This is for the private and public sectors. The exchange rate depends on the demands and supply conditions in the domestic interbank.

The interbank is fed by inflows such as imports, remittances, grants, aid, donations, foreign direct investment, and repatriation of profits. Any money that comes into the country through these official channels comes in through commercial banks for their clients. This feeds the interbank.

At first glance, you're probably thinking that these two markets are vastly independent and do not rely on each other. That is not entirely true. Foreign exchange companies deposit or surrender their net inflows to the interbank at the end of trading days. That makes them a part of the system.

There is usually a differential or spread between the two rates. This is primarily because the exchange companies, while not always charging a commission, charge a margin so that they make money.

As a result, the interbank and open market are two different rates. In normal circumstances, the difference between the two rates is small, however, in times of volatility, the spread may grow. Sometimes, however, the interbank rate is higher than the open market rate. This is very rare but has happened.

Similarly, outflows are also made through this category. Depending on the need of the market, the SBP can inject liquidity by selling foreign currency in the interbank. It can also wipe up liquidity by buying. As a retail buyer, you do not have access to the interbank rates. Instead, you go to the open market for all your foreign currency needs. The open market in Pakistan, or kerb market, primarily consists of Foreign currency exchanges where individuals can go buy and sell currency.

The open market, however, gets its inflows through remittances, travelers exchanging notes, and sometimes savers exchanging the currency they've held on to. You may be confused about remittances being an inflow in both the interbank and open market. This is because customers have the option to decide which channel to send their remittance from.

WHY IS THE OPEN MARKET RATE SO HIGH THESE DAYS?

There are numerous signs around that show there is a dollar shortage. For starters, in the most recent update by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Pakistan is yet again at its lowest level of Foreign Exchange reserves, in the last 8.5 years. In a consistently declining trend since October, the state bank's liquid foreign exchange reserves have slid to a dangerous \$5.576 billion. The FX reserves with banks also slid by 39 million dollars leaving Pakistan's total liquid FX reserves at \$11.42 billion.

To add to this very obvious shortage, all of the FX reserves with banks in the country are not present

in physical form.

Let's use an example to illustrate this.

Let's say a bank processes a payment for a company. The company's client sends the payment to the bank. The bank gets dollars deposited in its nostro account, it then converts the dollars to rupees and drops it in the customers account.

In today's digital age, while one can say the payment of dollars is made, the importer has not really sent back physical dollars to the Pakistani bank. It is a virtual payment that is settled internationally.

This is standard practice. In normal circumstances, you wouldn't even wonder about this. However, because there is a shortage of physical notes; the gap between the open bank and intermarket may be bridged partially by dealing with the issue.

SO IS BOSTON A GENIUS?

At first glance, Boston's idea of bringing back physical dollars through international trips might sound like a great idea but there's a major caveat one needs to address first – Who would buy Pakistani rupees internationally? It's not like there are tons of tourists and businessmen flying into the country; nor is the currency seen as the strongest of havens where people like to park their savings in.

It is a standard practice for exchange companies to gather all their illiquid currency and convert it to dollars in the UAE and bring them back. If Boston is referring to this as a solution, the extent of illiquid currency coming into the country is too low for this plan to work.

Moreover, the legality of flying in rupees is also a problem. International travel does not allow individuals to carry beyond \$10,000; nor are people allowed to be mules to carry currency. Also, the cost of visas and airline tickets also put a burden on the currency and its cost.

This makes this scheme effectively just a gimmick, unless suddenly investors abroad want to stock up on PKR.

KP tourism department fumbles funds

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

According to sources before the Tourism and culture authority, KP Tourism Corporation was working to

promote tourism in the province, which had arranged numerous annual events at tourist places. However, during the past two years, the authority could not arrange any major event to attract domestic and for-

ign tourists. According to sources, despite spending millions of rupees on participation in the Dubai Expo, the authority could not attract any foreign investment in the tourism sector.

Pakistan looking to increase cooperation, trade with Turkey, says envoy

ANKARA

ANADOLU AGENCY

Pakistan is looking to increase cooperation and trade in the areas of textiles, construction, defense, and clean energy with Turkey and is eyeing to raise trade volume to \$5 billion from the current \$1 billion within the next three to four years, Islamabad's envoy to Ankara said.

Speaking to Anadolu Agency, newly appointed Pakistan's ambassador in Ankara, Dr. Yousaf Junaid, thanked Turkey for helping Islamabad during the worst floods in 2022 and for diplomatic and moral support on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir — a lingering dispute between India and Pakistan, despite the UN Security Council's January

5, 1949 resolution, asking both countries to hold a free and impartial plebiscite to decide the fate of the region.

COOPERATION, BILATERAL TRADE: Recalling Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's suggestion of "collective research and pooling of resources" between the two countries during his last trip to Turkey, Junaid said the two countries have experience and expertise in several sectors including trade, defense, economy, and development.

"Through utilising complementarities and comparative advantage, both countries should enhance collaboration in key areas including in defense, digital and emerging technologies," he said.

"This is an important priority for us

where a lot of work is also being done. There are several potential areas where both countries can undertake collective research and pooling of resources," he added.

Junaid said Pakistan has a skilled labour force and an abundance of natural resources whilst Turkey has advanced technology that can be merged to become the leading textile manufacturer in the world.

"Similarly, in the clean energy sector, joint research facilities could be established for the development of clean energy resources, including cheaper and better solar energy systems," he added.

Construction is another area beneficial for both countries, he said, adding: "Turkey has decades-long experience which could be utilized by Pakistan. In this respect, TOKI is

being approached to play a role." TOKI is Turkey's state-run housing agency.

"Towards ensuring self-dependence in the defense sector, several projects are being undertaken jointly. MILGEM Corvette project is an excellent illustration of this joint collaboration," he added.

On bilateral trade volume crossing the \$1 billion mark, Junaid said: "This figure is well below the true potential that the two countries carry."

"To tap the potential and feeling to do this through liberalizing the trade in key product sectors, an Agreement on Trade in Goods was signed between the two countries on August 12, 2022. The agreement is being submitted to the Turkish Grand National Assembly for ratification. Once this

agreement becomes operational, the bilateral concessions granted by the two sides would help achieve exponential growth in value and volumes to reach a targeted trade volume of \$5 billion in the next three to four years," he said.

"Other efforts on bilateral levels to increase investment in key sectors of Pakistan's economy such as energy, food, and consumer goods from the Turkish side would complement the efforts to increase bilateral trade between the two countries," he added. Stating that Pakistan and Turkey have unique relations, Junaid said: "Bonds between two countries and people are unbreakable and embedded in our common civilisational, cultural and religious ethos."

**06 PAKISTAN TODAY
COMMENT**
**Are we heading
for a default?**

Those responsible should be identified, but that should not be an excuse for the state of the economy

THAT Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will personally talk to the IMF about the release of Pakistan's held-up tranche is not good news. Perhaps the dire straits in which Pakistan finds itself can be seen from the fact that after meeting its latest debt servicing obligation, the country's forex reserves have sunk to a mere \$4.5 billion, which only provides 45 days of cover for imports. Fuel, edible oil and lifesaving medicines are not yet short, but all three are imported and essential, and if, despite all the pooh-poohing by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Pakistan is indeed sailing very close to a default on its foreign obligations. With every debt servicing payment, the precipice draws closer.

Another problem that has arisen is that banks are not paying out dollars to those who maintain dollar deposits with them. That is raising memories of the 1998 confiscation of foreign exchange, when banks were told either to pay rupees, or to issue foreign exchange bearer certificates. There is something wrong, because those deposits are supposed to be covered by their own foreign exchange holdings. That might explain why depositors are being offered other currencies, which they do presumably have. The failure to pay back depositors could well result in a sort of run on the banks, not on rupee accounts, but on foreign exchange accounts. The government, and the State Bank, cannot continue for ever, staggering thus from crisis to crisis, scrabbling together the foxes needed to make the next payment. Signs are beginning to become visible, in the closing down of factories. While newer car factories might be seen as evidence that luxury consumption was being curtailed, the same cannot be said about the closing of Millat Tractors. That means that the whole Green Revolution, which depended on mechanization half a century ago, may now be grinding to a halt.

At this point in time, it almost seems irrelevant who is responsible for the state of the economy. The PTI is almost slavering for a default, while the PDM blames the crisis on bad decision-making when it was in office. Fixing blame is needed, but only if it also generates a solution, which neither party seems to have. If the PTI was indeed to blame, and it must admit that a modern economy cannot go bad so soon as it claims, it has been a year since it lost office. The PDM cannot escape responsibility now.

PAKISTAN TODAY
Dedicated to the legacy of late Hameed Nizami

**Arif Nizami (Late)
Founding Editor**

**Yousaf Nizami
Editor**

**M. A. Nizami
Joint Editor**

**Aziz-ud-Din Ahmad
Joint Editor**

**Umar Aziz
Executive Editor**

Political Extremism and Pakistan

► Polarization is riving families



USAMA ASGHAR

PAKISTAN is a wholly polarized country now. The extent of polarization may vary from the past, but it is no less than it. Polarization, in simple terms, is inclining an ideology to its extreme level and being focused on it even if it is contaminated.

In a polarized environment, there is no space for respecting one's opinions. People who are part of this environment are always at the edge of cutting the throat of their antagonists. They don't sit and cogitate over problems, but they choose to disconcert their opponents with how wrong, morally corrupt, and vulgar they are without giving any evidence to these claims. Polarization doesn't go along with logic or facts but animosity, violence, and abuse.

Amid the political and constitutional jumble in our country, there was a viral video of a child blatantly speaking about one political party. He said, "You two brothers eat the whole country together, and we three brothers eat one bread together." His outrage and anguish toward one political party was on show, as was his allegiance to the other, as he was dressed in PTI costume. It is what we as a society are infiltrating into our very young generation: polarization or political extremism. His response to the other political party could have been different if we had brought up facts and logically based statements and had taught him to agree to disagree. It's just one of many viral videos, but it's only the worst that is mentioned here.

The main cause of political extremism in our society is our incessant political chaos, disdain for politics, and acrimonious culture in rallies. Countries like Pakistan, which have been polarized through its genesis, become more politically radical when their leaders stand on the rostrum and call the opponents crooks, morally corrupt, and politically dishonest. They make fun of their jargon and discriminate against them based on gender. When these things are illustrated to their followers, they do the same. They advocate the reckless statements of their leaders and justify them at every junction, which disintegrates society.



Another reason that facilitates political extremism is the existence of populism in politics. Populism jeopardizes liberal democracies, and populist leaders make it arduous for democracies to run effectively. It doesn't matter whether the populists are on the Treasury benches, for they still can cause substantial deterioration to the degree to which the citizens relish fundamental rights. Populism splits society into two categories (a) Good and righteous people and (b) evil and morally corrupt people. They put themselves in the former group, and all their opponents are in the latter group.

When illiberal democracies are exerted in a country, there is invariably a drift in polarization and po-

litical extremism. These facets put political discourse in a corner; it doesn't allow two dissenting groups to have beneficial political and cultural debates. When there is a scarcity of dissent in a conversation, it leads to a new form of polarization called Belief polarization.

It is more likely for yes-men or like-minded thinkers. When they sit down and talk about things and share similar ideas about those views, it bolsters their beliefs and makes them more politically extreme. Populists enjoy a massive cult, and in that following, there are hundreds of thousands of people who share identical beliefs. They become incapable of halting their beliefs, and it makes them intolerable to the populace who are of opposite views.

Political extremism has induced a widespread scathing culture in politics. Politicians come to TV, and they evade talking about essential issues, but all the time, they abuse their opponents on national TV channels. If they don't feel satisfied by abusing on TV or face censor issues, they use their party platforms, that is, political rallies, to ignite more hate. By making misogynist statements about their opposing party's women politicians, they feel satisfied, like they have achieved something big by disgracing

themselves. It's disreputable and disgusting, but unfortunately, it has been a norm in our country.

They need to apprehend that it is not only restricted to their rallies, but it has a spillover in society in the form of indirect violence and more intolerance. Children cannot make friends from the political party their parents are not backing. Family members have diverged under one roof, and they don't talk to each other. Discussing politics in a typical Pakistani home is a habit, but unfortunately, people now avoid doing it because they know they emotionally pertain to it. When people are emotionally involved, they don't consider rationality, and rational debates have vanished from the politically extreme society due to their unquestioning allegiance to their political leaders.

Political extremism has severe effects on the economy. When politicians are not willing to sit down and not going to talk about economic policies, and the politicians from opposition parties keep sharing misinformation and misinterpreted facts about the economy of the country, it will lead to flux in the market. Pakistan's economy is still being pulverized, and another crevasse can induce an acute economic crisis.

It's high time for our politicians to end this abusive political culture. If our country continued to stay politically extreme, that

would cause severe violence in our society. A child whose video was viral is not at fault. He doesn't seem to understand what is happening around him, and if we continue to keep injecting hate into his mind, then one day, we will be facing the music of all our blunders. That's a natural phenomenon.

For politicians, this polarization will benefit them for a short-term period. Still, it would be better if they signed a charter of democracy and exercised a healthy democracy which in the longer term would be benefitted to our country.

The writer is a freelance columnist

Terrorism and negotiations side-by-side

► The Afghan Taliban government cannot afford the TTP either



ATTIYA MUNAWER

TERRORISM is the indiscriminate or disproportionate use of violence against civilian targets, a product of modernity and a globalization of the wrong meaning of 'jihadism' that shows no signs of abating. This idea terrorism is on the rise again in Pakistan and state institutions are very active in dealing with it, but the ongoing political and economic instability in the country is also a major obstacle to stopping terrorism.

All these situations are disturbing and cause a great challenge for the government and the country, and require that all the leadership keep aside all the differences and unite to crush the head of terrorism that is still rising like in the past, and unanimously come up with such a plan of action after which no change in policy can be made until the complete end of terrorism. If the country's political and institutional leadership does not follow agreed policies, it seems impossible to stop the renewed rise in terrorism in the country.

There is no doubt that Pakistan has been going through the harsh stages of terrorism, sectarianism and civil war for a long time during which one thing has come to light that no group or organization dares to act until the time when there lies a sympathy regarding them within the state institutions and civil society, and this sympathy can be with some group or individual; with this, the main reason for the failure to control terrorism has come to light which is the unbalanced policy of the state institutions and the government.

The Pakistan government has failed to adopt a policy due to one or the other expediency due to which sometimes strictness and sometimes leniency have been used. However, there have been repeated negotiations with terrorists after every military operation and it is because of these agreements that such militant groups have been given the opportunity to cope once again.

In this situation, experts in Pakistan's

defense affairs and especially those who have experience in dealing with terrorism seem to raise questions that the state can negotiate with another state, but under which law and constitution can there be negotiations with people guilty of crimes against their country? States do not negotiate and deal with their criminals,

Terrorism and negotiations will not go together. The Afghan Taliban should not show any flexibility against the terrorist elements. There is a common interest of both countries in preserving order, and in view of this interest, both countries can be successful in establishing peace with the end of terrorism in the region

rather they catch them and punish them under the law.

The coalition government, though late, has now decided to negotiate with the Afghan government instead of negotiating with a terrorist organization because the Afghan Taliban government promised the whole world, including Pakistan, that they would not allow their land to be used against anyone else, if it is implemented then the whole world, including Pakistan, will be safe from terrorism.

Pakistan has repeatedly reminded the

Afghan government of its promise, but instead of fulfilling its promise, the Afghan government is evasive and due to this, the relationship between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban government is getting complicated. The PTI government had also held talks with the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan at the official level through the

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Terrorism and negotiations will not go together. The Afghan Taliban should not show any flexibility against the terrorist elements. There is a common interest of both countries in preserving order, and in view of this interest, both countries can be successful in establishing peace with the end of terrorism in the region

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mediation of the Afghan government to combat terrorism.

These talks continued despite the change of government in Pakistan but things have not progressed beyond a temporary ceasefire. The TTP has increased its terrorist activities in Pakistan since the announcement of the end of the ceasefire. Looking at this situation, the Pakistani government has indicated that if the Afghan Taliban does not take action against the outlawed TTP, then Pakistan will take action against it itself.

Currently, there is a political and economic crisis in the country and on the other hand, terrorist attacks are increasing. Two officers of a sensitive institution were targeted in Khanewal last Wednesday. The terrorist group Lashkar-i-Khorasan has also claimed responsibility for the attack. Where strict action is necessary against elements hostile to the country, there is also a need to take the Afghan government into confidence. Pakistan should give information about the hideouts of terrorists and demand action against them and if they do not take any action against them, then Pakistan will have to take action on its own terms. How long will the Pakistani forces wait for action from the Afghan Taliban and continue to see the unjust bloodshed of their soldiers?

The constraints and expediency of the Afghan government are in their place, but the Afghan government should also understand that the elements who shed the blood of innocent people unjustly are extremely dangerous for them as well. While the TTP is doing terrorism in Pakistan, the Afghan people are also being bathed in blood unjustly by means of terrorism initiated by ISIS, based on the ideology of TTP. So, terrorism and negotiations will not go together. The Afghan Taliban should not show any flexibility against the terrorist elements. There is a common interest of both countries in preserving order, and in view of this interest, both countries can be successful in establishing peace with the end of terrorism in the region.

The writer tweets @AttiyaMunawer



Avoiding the default label...

Misplaced austerity

NAQI AKBAR

N the backdrop of the deafening noise of accusations and counter accusations narratives; bordering on sleaze; the type, once penned by Harold Robbins and scientifically debated by D.H. Lawrence, many Pakistanis; surprisingly despite being hard-pressed, are not glued to the latest in avoiding default. Rather, they are lending their ears to what is being discussed and said on Twitter, YouTube or other social media platforms. Despite the fact that it is not their priority, the fact is the other way round.

Pakistan, after its 75 years of existence, has come full circle, to what is the defining moments of its success or failure or even its existence or otherwise in the end. For many cynical observers, Pakistan is to stay even in its current position, provided there are interested stakeholders to its strategic location in the region and its willingness to do odd jobs as and when required.

Foremost amongst the problems has been its economic crunch, which unfortunately dates back to its formative years. The paradigms and policies adopted by the young republic as dictated by the usurping cliques were best suited for a client-state status. A state which is ready to do the strategic jobs and put back its welfare and economy-related duties. The basic difference between the two siblings, the outcome of the 1947 'cesarean birth', India and Pakistan, has been precisely that. While Indians thought it opportune to court both the Americans and the Russians, our key civil and military policy-makers thought it was beneficial to have a package, complete with imports, foreign aid, investment as well as the way of life; capitalism without any shackles. Consequently, it chose the USA.

The results were high growth rates dependent upon certain assumptions. During that period, our key economists used to chide the Indian siblings as maintaining what they called the three-percent 'Hindu growth rate'. At that point, our topnotch industrialists raced through Karachi lanes in Mercedes and Opel brands while their Indian counterparts had no inhibitions roaming about in locally manufactured 'Ambassador' vehicles.

Without going into the timelines, the Pakistani foreign trade was dependent eternally on IMF doses, while the Indians were tuned to first make their industrial base; followed by controlled liberalization and finally a well-timed transition into the capitalist economy. Pakistan has its first jolt when an ill-timed strategic venture, 'Operation Gibraltar', blew up into a full-scale 17-day war in 1965, which 'broke the back' of the Pakistani economy.

With military hardware sanctions and not-so-friendly IMF, Pakistan was to fend for itself in the economic and military spheres. The outcome was a failed economic takeoff during the 1966-1970 period. All these economic realities boiled down to firstly centrifugal tendencies, political unrest and finally political protest, which put the key policy makers on the defensive. That time was characterized by grabbing and proverbial 'snatching' by the West Pakistani political elite.

That was the time when Pakistan never recovered from the ill impact of its misplaced priorities. However, Pakistan did not review the policy and remained part of the pro-US military alliances. WikiLeaks in one of its file links states how Pakistan Air Force participation in the Mid

Link 1974 exercises in the Indian Ocean irked the Indian Foreign Minister to issue a statement on the floor of Lok Sabha in November 1974.

The 1977 political crisis, military coup and the changes around Pakistan convinced the key policy-makers in Pakistan to again paste the 'for hire' notice for the West's attention. Predictably, the USA employed the Pakistani military and society to wage its proxy war against the USSR in Afghanistan. How that war destroyed the Pakistani social fabric has been dealt with in detail by many analysts. The long-term outcome was that the Pakistani economy got addicted to what during Musharraf and Zardari period came to be known as 'Coalition Support Fund' factor or 'budgetary support' factor, also pointed out by US strategist Bruce Reidel in his writings; in terms of economic resources.

The Pakistani planners' only concern was to appease the IMF for more SDRs to keep the military complex going in one way or another. The economy in fact never got the attention it merited. The IMF dictates made the economy gradually a high-cost one. To top it off, the hybrid experiment period central bank decision to leave the dollar to the market forces dealt a deadly blow to what was left of the Pakistani economy.

The Pakistan high-cost economy, addicted to a developed-world lifestyle, at war with its neighbours on one pretext or another, could only live comfortably, if it was given any geopolitical 'Supari'. With such jobs being competitively contested, the only option could have been to push up the economy of a few sectors in a manner which could infuse growth all over.

However, again the priority was profits or spoils of war. The political instability, which in fact has been self-inflicted by the established order recently experienced by the country; that political unrest created out of an intimate pillow fight has left the country in economic shambles. Investors are in a state of indecisiveness, people are below the poverty line. Consumption patterns are below the average levels; levels which are necessary for revenue growth for the industry, trade and retail.

Coupled with that, the rising militancy has put the country in a quagmire, never earlier experienced. Today, stifling imports for keeping the reserves in a manageable state has become

Moving forward, the default; already done technically; or the one expected as an avalanche, has the potential to change the dynamics of the polity and society. That aspect cannot be shrugged away as external shock or global impact. Decision makers need to look at the problems, which led to this state of affairs; though it is already time lapsed. The issues might be pushed beneath the rug for some time, however, any political government will continue to be haunted by the undercurrents beneath that proverbial 'rug'. A truth and reconciliation approach by the decision-making stakeholders is necessary; more than getting on board a new geopolitical package; an IMF package on the back of the former. The state might need a big reset; avoiding which might land it into unmanageable chaos

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makers need to look at the problems, which led to this state of affairs; though it is already time lapsed. The issues might be pushed beneath the rug for some time, however, any political government will continue to be haunted by the undercurrents beneath that proverbial 'rug'. A truth and reconciliation approach by the decision-making stakeholders is necessary; more than getting on board a new geopolitical package; an IMF package on the back of the former. The state might need a big reset; avoiding which might land it into unmanageable chaos.

The writer is a freelance columnist

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Power struggle amid growing poverty

THROUGHOUT the course of human history, mankind has seen many changes in the realms of living standards, agriculture, culture and civilisation as well as in terms of socio-economic, religious and political domains. Nonetheless, actual progress is something that has remained a mirage. The world may be flaunted as a place where everything has become achievable and possible, but reality suggests otherwise. The other side of the picture features fissures that continue to push the so-called advanced world towards the edge. For instance, most developed countries, like the United States and Russia, pose existential threat to the world at large because they appear to be in some sort of never-ending arms race. Nuclear weapons have sown the seeds of destruction that may hit us any time.

In recent times, the Ukraine crisis has forced Russian President Vladimir Putin to talk about possible use of nuclear weapons and keeping them on high alert as a threat to Western powers. On its part, the West responded with threats of retaliation and consequences. Is this a scenario indicative of human progress? Only a twisted mind can make such a claim.

Moreover, the world is caught up in territorial disputes that have the potential to destroy the world wherein humanity might perish. It is a common observation that strained relations between Pakistan and India, largely due to the Kashmir dispute, represent a flashpoint that may trigger a nuclear war between the two neighbouring countries.

Other such cases include the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and, indeed, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. Unresolved issues like these are warnings that the world needs to adopt a progressive outlook rather than living on the edge of this knife or that. Moving on, have the humans succeeded in eradicating chronic diseases like, say, cancer and diabetes? Lately, a single virus, later called Covid, left the whole world crippled. The horrible consequences of that single virus and its various mutations touched every aspect of life, and touched it negatively. For months, all major actors of the international community got down on their knees and accepted their defeat against that virus. That in a critical sense exposed the net worth of the progress humans claim to have made.

Furthermore, climate change is a pestering wound that has caused flare-ups in the shape of disasters, like flash floods, droughts, tsunamis, landslides, earthquakes, avalanches, hurricanes and other means that continue to perpetuate the cycle of huge mass displacement, grinding poverty, agricultural losses, social nuisance, environmental degradation and economic consequences. For instance, Pakistan, despite contributing even less than one per cent to the phenomenon of global warming, has to face difficult times and is at the mercy of major climate change culprits. The world community has yet to map out a plan to de-carbonise and turn to a carbon-free economic order that may be functional and acceptable at the global level. In short, there is a long distance to travel before actual progress can be claimed. Before judging the book by its cover, it is important to realise that cosmetic changes do not mean progress. A tangible improvement must show positive results. For example, the world is stuck in the yoke of hunger and grinding poverty that lead to huge losses annually, but the international community takes deeper interest in maintaining hegemonic control of a few mighty powers over the rest of the world.

**ABDUL QADEER SELIRO
LARKANA**

Corporates should address disparity

THE start of the new year is used by many as a time to look back at the year gone by and see what the takeaway has been. In the corporate world, this is the time when many entities evaluate how the company performed and what was the contribution of each individual; a sort of performance audit which determines the grant of performance-based bonuses and salary increments for the employees. Taking into account the massive inequalities in income and wealth of individuals, which are multiplying every year, I offer some unsolicited recommendations to the decision-makers in the private and public sectors. They may find these recommendations awkward because the people who can make a difference happen to be the beneficiaries of the system which perpetuates inequalities. For starters, I will take a cue from the recent interview of an official of the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI) in which he advocated a minimum wage of Rs56,000 per month. This minimum wage should be adopted for all kinds of workers not only in the corporate world but across the country.

The annual bonus in the corporate sector should be restricted to a maximum of 30 per cent of the annual salary of the outgoing year for all employees whose annual salary is Rs5 million and above. This should be done instead of the outrageous bonuses given, especially in the banking sector, where published accounts in some cases show performance bonuses to the chief executive exceeding the amount of total annual salary. Bonuses in excess of the above percentage should be considered for persons drawing lesser salaries. The gap in income, and consequently the wealth of employees in the corporate sector, goes up every year because of a flawed and inequitable system whereby annual increments are based mostly on the same percentage increase across the organisation. Therefore, if the decision is to give an overall 10pc annual increase with effect from Jan 1, the top gun in the organisation, who makes, say, Rs100 million per annum, will get an increase of Rs10 million annually; over Rs800,000 per month. On the other hand, a person on a lower rung whose total salary per year is, say, Rs600,000, will have an additional Rs60,000; Rs 5,000 per month.

The disparity caused by just one increment is so massive that it is painful to even try to work it over, say 10 years. That being so, the recommendation is to maintain the overall increment at 10pc, but give no increment for the next year to persons whose annual salary is more than Rs120 million, or Rs10 million per month, only 2pc to those with annual salary Rs75-120 million, and 5pc to those with annual salary ranging Rs50-75 million. Similar slabs can be introduced further down the line, with increments to individuals at the lowest rung going up to 20pc. At each tier, the distribution should be based on merit. This will keep the employees productive and still contain the overall impact of the payroll to within whatever percentage approved by the board of directors. The decision-makers will not address this simple issue because it will affect their own earnings. Though I have a fair idea of the significant contribution made by chief executives and senior managements to profitability, but can they do that without the whole team being on board? Finally, a recommendation related to the vehicles provided to the senior management. There has been a dramatic increase in luxury cars over the last few years, and it is time the corporate sector restricted the facility to 1,800cc vehicles. The recommendations, if followed even in part, will enable the corporate entities to take the moral high ground and raise the bar for the market at large. Similar actions should be taken by all the public-sector organisations. For once, let us try to do something rational where we can.

**AHMED KHAN
KARACHI**

WESTERN MEDIA'S ANTI-IRAN REPORTING WAIVES JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY TO MANUFACTURE HATE

RT
ROBERT INLAKESH

INCE the eruption of civil unrest in the Islamic Republic back in September, Western media has not shied away from spreading uncorroborated or outright false stories about Iran's government. The implications of the constant stream of disinformation is the justification of sanctions that kill Iranians. Following the death in Iranian custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, back in mid-September, civil unrest in Iran spread far and wide, with protests sparked over foreign media reports that had indicated that the young woman was beaten to death by Iran's morality police. Later, CCTV footage was released, which contradicted some reports on how the young woman had died, followed by a coroner report which indicated her death came due to cerebral hypoxia as a result of underlying issues. Despite this, the demonstrations that started on September 16 continued.

What started initially as a number of demonstrations, primarily in Kurdish-predominant areas of Iran, turned into a nationwide disunited movement that took the form of violent riots, online social media campaigns, symbolic hijab burning protests and even deadly terrorist attacks against sites of worship. As Iran accused the United States and Israel of attempting to spark a Syria-style civil war, US President Joe Biden vowed to "free Iran" during a speech in California. Amongst the chaos and the media reporting that aimed to portray the Iranian government as a distinct kind of evil, the Biden administration began to tighten its 'maximum pressure' sanctions campaign. The current US sanctions campaign, first enacted under the former Trump administration, has been condemned by the International Court of Justice due to its impact on humanitarian goods, such as medicine, entering Iran.

FROM TRUSTED OUTLETS LIKE THE AP, TO CNN, ALL THE WAY TO THE TABLOIDS, THERE IS LITTLE CARE FOR FACT CHECKING AND JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY

Perhaps the most prominent piece of disinformation that has been disseminated about Iran during the past few months was the assertion, by Newsweek, that 15,000 Iranian demonstrators were sentenced to death. According to the initial claims, the Iranian parliament had supposedly voted to approve this move, implying that the country's judiciary took no part in such a massive decision. The story was spread by leading online personas and even Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, who later deleted his post on Twitter about the matter.

However, since then the outlandish claims have not stopped coming. Prior to the Iranian national team's game against the US in the FIFA World Cup, CNN released a report that no other major news outlet, save for a few tabloid news sites in the UK, touched. CNN quoted an unnamed "security source" that according to the report had managed to find out that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had infiltrated Qatar in order to threaten the Iranian team's players.

The CNN story states that the source somehow found out that the players were offered luxury gifts, such as vehicles, prior to the beginning of the World Cup, which would imply that the source had intel on the Iranian team when they were in Tehran before the tournament. The report goes on to say that IRGC officials threatened the Iranian players' families with torture in the event that they may protest their government during the World Cup. CNN's source also claims that the coach of the Iranian team, a Portuguese national, was also interviewed by the IRGC, although they weren't able to hear what was discussed like they did with the players.

The same article makes the additional claim that the Iranian government was flying out pro-government supporters to watch the team play, in essence creating artificial fans. None of the claims have been corroborated, and it didn't gain purchase with major news outlets, which is strange considering the severity of the allegations being made that the IRGC, an official branch of Iran's armed forces, had violated Qatar's sovereignty in order to threaten their own football team. The difference between the CNN and Newsweek piece is that with the "security source", there is no way to determine with certainty whether the whole thing is made up or not.

In the advent of news that Iran had abolished its morality police unit, responsible for the arrest of Mahsa

Amini, another false story emerged from a number of little-known crypto-currency outlets online, claiming that Iran was set to freeze the bank account of women who weren't wearing the appropriate Islamic covering. The origins of the story came from an interview that was conducted with an ultra-conservative member of Iran's parliament, Hossein Jalali, who allegedly proposed a three-warning system via SMS, with the end penalty being the freezing of bank accounts. This has never come close to being implemented or even been discussed in parliament. Despite this, tweets claiming that Iran was implementing this strategy went viral.

Posts on social media from influencers have claimed that the Iranian security forces "are raping children", and that young women are being murdered for showing their hair in a "horrific" and "medieval" crackdown. These reactions naturally come as a result of the factual inaccuracies of the reporting about Iran and we continue to see more and more as the weeks go on.

The most recent misrepresentation of the facts has come in the coverage and reaction to a number of executions in Iran. Earlier this month, the second death sentence connected to the recent civil unrest was carried out. This led to headlines from the likes of the Associated Press (AP), that read 'Iran execution: Man publicly hanged from crane amid protests', which is how we saw the sentencing of Majidreza Rahnavard to death, by the Iranian judiciary, framed throughout Western media. The AP piece opens with the following paragraph: "Iran executed a second prisoner on Monday convicted over crimes committed during the nationwide protests challenging the country's theocracy, publicly hanging him from a construction crane as a gruesome warning to others."

Whilst the AP article did explain, further down in the piece, that the young Iranian man had stabbed to death two Iranian security officials, injuring 4 others, what is written works to present Tehran as a monstrous regime that is unjustly killing Iranian protesters as a warning to others. The reality is, Iran does have a death sentence and does carry it out, but since some States in the US do the same, the story has to be twisted so that Iran is singled out as a special kind of evil. Iran's death sentence is handed out through a judicial process, during which Majidreza Rahnavard admitted to killing two security officials. The incident was even filmed. No country on

earth would allow such a crime to go unpunished.

In total, roughly 400 Iranians have allegedly been sentenced to prison terms for their involvement in various criminal activities during the latest round of civil unrest. Two Iranians have been executed, after admitting to carrying out attacks against the nation's security forces. Whilst there are others who may receive the death penalty, the Western media took it upon themselves to whip up a frenzy about an execution that was not even ruled. Earlier this month, several outlets ran headlines with allegations that an Iranian football player from Isfahan was next in line for execution. Reports claimed that a small-time football player, Nasr Azadani, had been sentenced to death and despite the Iranian judiciary denying this, the claims took hold on social media. 26-year-old Nasr Azadani was arrested in connection with the murder of several members of Iran's security services. It has been reported that an indictment carrying the charge of "accessory to moharebeh" had been communicated with Azadani. The charge of "moharebeh" ("war against God" in Islamic law) can carry with it a death sentence, however, it is not clear whether being an accessory would be ruled this way.

The problem here is that Western media outlets jump on unsubstantiated claims, and repeat half truths, in an attempt to extract a predetermined anti-Iran narrative. From trusted outlets like the AP, to CNN, all the way to the tabloids, there is little care for fact checking and journalistic integrity. The goal is to delegitimize the Iranian government, to encourage outrage. Factual information is only important for nit-picking in a way that supports this biased narrative. At the same time, it is somewhat ironic that none of these media outlets, or Western politicians that repeat their claims and feign concern over Iranian prisoners, care one bit for journalist Julian Assange, who the US is attempting to extradite from the United Kingdom.

The outcomes of this kind of reporting are the encouragement of prejudiced hate against Iranian culture, the justification of sanctions that kill Iranians and the peddling of new-Orientalism talking points, all whilst claiming to be in support of human rights and feminism. There are various ways to make good faith criticisms of the Iranian government, but this is not what we are seeing, this is the Western media machine piling in on a regime change agenda, and everything they say needs to be taken with a pinch of salt.

Robert Inlakesh is a political analyst, journalist and documentary filmmaker currently based in London, UK.

Raise nuclear deterrence

ABOUT TIME S. KOREA, US TOOK JOINT RESPONSE TO NK NUKE'S TO HIGHER LEVEL

EDITORIAL
KOREA HERALD

U S President Joe Biden said "no" when asked by a reporter at the White House on Tuesday if he was currently discussing joint nuclear exercises with South Korea. His reply briefly caused confusion as it could be interpreted as contradicting remarks by his South Korean counterpart.

President Yoon Suk-yeol said in an interview with the Chosun Ilbo, published Monday, "The nuclear weapons belong to the United States, but planning, information sharing, exercises and training should be jointly conducted by South Korea and the US. The US has a considerably positive position (on the idea)."

Yoon's top adviser for press affairs, Kim Eun-hye, said that probably Biden had no other choice but to answer "no" because a reporter asked him the question abruptly without context. She added that "joint nuclear exercises can only be held between nuclear weapons states."

According to Reuters, a senior US administration official said that joint nuclear exercises with Seoul would be "extremely difficult" because South Korea is not a nuclear power, but that the allies are looking at enhanced information sharing, joint contingency planning and an eventual tabletop exercise.

Further explanations by Kim and the US official seem to be made to prevent Biden's reply from creating the impression that there are differences between the two allies.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un recently vowed to increase his country's nuclear weapons arsenal "exponentially" and singled out South Korea as an "undoubted enemy." He also vowed to develop a new type of intercontinental ballistic missiles that would give the North a "quick counterstrike capability." Last year it approved a new law authorizing the preemptive use of nuclear weapons.

Considering Pyongyang's escalating nuclear threat, Yoon may have wanted to show through the interview a solid alliance with Washington. However, Biden's terse "no" effectively weakened any such impression, though that may not have been his intention. But given North Korea's rapid development of ICBMs

and nuclear weapons, South Korea and the US have no other choice but to strengthen nuclear deterrence.

North Korea is on the brink of completing intercontinental ballistic missiles that can strike US cities. If it finishes the job, it would be difficult to expect Washington to use nuclear weapons to strike back against a North Korean attack on South Korea. Few US Presidents would take the risk of sacrificing a large number of US citizens for the sake of defending South Korea. The US has defended non-nuclear allies through its nuclear umbrella and extended deterrence, but North Korea's ceaseless development of ICBM and nuclear weapon programs arouses concerns about the effectiveness of US nuclear umbrella.

South Korea and the international community have striven to denuclearize North Korea but the North has kept on increasing its missile and nuclear capabilities. Denuclearizing the North should remain an objective for Seoul and Washington, but attaining it has become practically impossible. South Korea needs to focus on a more realistic objective, and that is nuclear deterrence.

A sure way to prevent a nuclear attack would be to possess nuclear weapons. In this view, Seoul needs to consider defending itself with its own nuclear weapons. But in reality, it is difficult to put the idea into practice. Seoul has no other choice but to rely on US nuclear weapons to deter a North Korean nuclear attack.

When it comes to fending off North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile threats, as a matter of fact, Seoul and Washington pledged to further strengthen the alliance's capabilities, information sharing, and consultation process, as well as joint planning and execution. The pledge was contained in the joint communiqué issued by South Korean National Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin following the 54th Security Consultative Meeting held in Washington in November last year.

The US has barred South Korea from accessing nuclear weapons and instead offers its nuclear umbrella. Given the North's nearly complete nuclear missile program, the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence must be raised. If the US puts the pledge into practice early, it will be a significant progress in that direction.

Harry, no... Why Spare is a step too far even for this royals fan



INDEPENDENT
JESSIE THOMPSON

WAIT. Say that again. They call each other Willy and Harold? Harry's necklace was ripped?! He was injured by a dog bowl!?! The explosive account of a fight between Prince Harry and Prince William, from Harry's forthcoming memoir Spare, contains the kind of intimate, incidental details that usually make me giddily incredulous. I'm the type of casual royal watcher who has vague political opinions about inherited privilege but will neck a new Tina Brown book like it's a tasty mojito. I watch new seasons of The Crown in a single sitting. I have even googled "Princess Margaret wearing sunglasses young". Basically, I'm here for the drama. So I find myself in an unusual position. Harry's book is undoubtedly the biggest and most anticipated book release of 2023, offering a no-holds-barred look into the reality of his royal life. And yet... the thought of actually reading it? Oh god. Now I'm not actually sure that I want to.

So far, the leaked excerpts of the book, which was accidentally published early in Spain, have been horrifyingly personal. The more that emerges – Harry begging his father not to marry Camilla, Meghan accusing Kate of having "baby brain" – the more I feel a stress headache coming on. The Queen's death in September made a forthcoming book full of broadsides feel catastrophically timed, with the publication date not finally confirmed until the end of October. But now Spare – really, what a title – is about to come out, and I want to run and hide.

It's not just the problem of oversaturation, although there is that. The joke that Harry has broken his silence – "again" – is turning into a cliché. This is the opposite of silence; a constant cacophony. The appearances come thick and fast now, with two major TV interviews for the book's release, both heavily trailed with déjà vu-ish

quotes. ("I don't know how staying silent is ever going to make things better"). Last year's six-hour Netflix saga made me feel like I was stuck in a Groundhog Day of softly lit petty grievances and dramatic but vague claims. "I had to do everything I could to protect my family," said Harry. "I was being fed to the wolves," said Meghan. We saw a couple who seemed paralysed by bitterness, who had overplayed their hand and overestimated the public's interest in them. In my review of the second volume, I feared they'd made a Faustian pact, destined to only garner attention by criticising the royal family, the very institution they'd wanted to escape.

Judging by early insights into the contents of Spare, this seems to be continuing – and it all just feels too private. There's an uneasy sense of being made a voyeur to a family in deep pain, in a way we didn't ever need or ask to be. Stories of fights and fallouts may fascinate us, but I suspect many will simply want to turn away. As Tolstoy wrote, "every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"; festering family rifts are as common as they are difficult, and at this point I'd assume that proud royalists and staunch republicans are generally united by the fact we'd all quite like to see the Windsors heal.

In writing his own memoir, Harry was perhaps inspired by his mother's collaboration with Andrew Morton on the biography Diana: Her True Story, based on covertly recorded interviews with the princess. It's now been described as the closest thing we'll ever get to her autobiography, but the context is quite different: unlike Harry, Diana was then still in the royal family, married to their heir to the throne and unable to use her own voice.

In their Netflix documentary, Meghan, on one of the many occasions the couple used their own voices, asked, "When the stakes are this high, doesn't it make sense to hear our story from us?" But that's the thing with a lot of royal stories. They're low stakes, glamourous soap operas, full of unreal versions of real people, and most of us know that. My own royal fascination basically comes from an interest in history, gossip and nice dresses. I'm not here to be a fly on the wall for a family therapy session. Some may argue that The Crown is damaging to the royals – but we know that it mainly consists of nice-looking recreations of things on the public record, or imagined versions of things that aren't.

CORPORATE CORNER



LAHORE: ICMAP Chairman Ziaul Mustafa gives away Lifetime Achievement Award to Nestle Pakistan Chairman Syed Yawar Ali. Former LCCI President Irfan Shaikh and others are also present on the occasion. STAFF PHOTO

RIU hosts 17th Convocation



The seventeen convocation of Riphah International University was held at the convention center Islamabad. Riphah International University is the only university, which is organizing the education and training of male and female students based on Islamic ethical values. For this purpose, Riphah has set some values as a guiding light for him. Al-Akhira, Itteqan, Rahma, Mushawra, Ijtemahiya and Mohasiba are the values that Riphah adheres to as its basic values and I want to assure you today that you can become a good doctor and a good engineer in professional life only by applying these values. Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Anees Ahmed expressed these views during his speech at the seventeenth convocation of Riphah International University. He congratulated the newly graduates and advised them to serve the nation and play a positive role in this regard. Addressing the convocation ceremony, Chancellor Mr. Hassan Muhammad Khan said that today is a day of pride and gratitude not only for the students but also for their parents and teachers because no student is successful only because of hard work, until the sacrifices of his/her parents and the commitments of his/her teachers are involved. He congratulated the students who received medals and degrees and wished them all the best. Furthermore, Hassan Muhammad Khan reiterated his determination that Riphah International University will continue to play its constructive role in the development of Pakistan, and we will continue our services in the field of education without discrimination. PR

Future Fest draws huge crowds on second day



LAHORE: The second day of Pakistan's largest tech conference and expo, Future Fest witnessed over 10,000 attendees, 70 exhibitors, and 60 speakers including powerful keynote from Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Youth Affairs, Shaza Fatima Khawaja on the need for engaging Pakistan's vibrant youth across the various facets of technology for a prosperous and brighter future. The second day of Future Fest also witnessed the signing of an important MoU, under which Tracking.me, a company that sells Saudi made hardware and software, is acquiring Telematics Private Limited, a local distributor in Pakistan known for selling Saudi made tracing devices. This follows the powerful announcement earlier on the eve of Future Fest from HRH Prince Fahad bin Mansour Alsaoud, on the establishment of a dedicated Saudi - Pakistan Tech House and his announcement of creating a further 300+ projects for his company Isla Interactive with 100 Million project value, creating more than a 1000+ jobs in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and globally. Day 2 also featured an interactive meditation performance, "How to awaken the giant" by Naeem Zamindar, Founder Neem. Keynote sessions were given by Ikram Sehgal, Chairman, Pathfinder Group, Usman Asif, CEO, DevsInc, Sadafe Abid, CEO, Circle, AVM(R.) Dr. Rizwan Riaz, Pro-Rector Research, Innovation, Commercialization, RIC NUST. PR

AJK PM claims expanding tax payers network

MUZAFFARABAD

STAFF REPORT

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Sardar Tanveer Ilyas Khan has claimed that his government had gained the full support and trust of the masses due to its people-friendly initiatives, which made it raise the taxpayers' number from 5,000 to 37,000 in the region.

"We all are united with regard to the welfare and development of the state and we all have to play a responsible role to meet the challenges", he said.

Talking about increasing the tax net and making the tax system people-friendly, he said that the current government had increased the number of tax filers exponentially.

"There were misunderstandings among the people regarding tax which are being removed and the tax system is being made more simple and people friendly.", the PM said, adding that for the convenience of the people, the date of submission of tax returns is being extended till February 27.

He appreciated the efforts of Inland Revenue and Finance Minister Abdul Majid Khan and his team for

their significant contribution to the expansion of the tax net in the region. He said that the number of tax filers would be taken up to 100,000 and a special budget would be allocated to the department for public awareness in this regard.

The AJK PM directed the Income Tax Department to conduct an awareness campaign and explain the benefits of taxes to the people by launching a door-to-door drive.

He also announced a reward of Rs 20 million for the officers who showed the highest level of performance.

GOVT STRUGGLING TO REVIVE RAILWAYS, CIVIL AVIATION, PIA: SAAD RAFIQUE

LAHORE

STAFF REPORT

FEDERAL Minister for Railways and Aviation Khawaja Saad Rafique has said the government is striving hard to revive the Pakistan Railways, Civil Aviation and Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) despite the short period of the government.

Addressing a press conference held at the PR headquarters here on Saturday, he strongly condemned the negative propaganda against the PR and other departments.

He said that recently a propaganda news was published by a local newspaper without facts and added that the coaches were imported after observing strict standards.

He said that 46 coaches had been imported from China on transfer of

technology basis while the rest of the coaches would be made in the railways carriage factory.

He said that it was a routine job that the PR reviewed and test every imported product so did the PR did in this case and found a minor issue which would be corrected by the Chinese engineers at their own cost.

The minister said that the Railways had earned Rs 28.23 billion between July and December and the department had to bear a loss of Rs 7 billion due to the unexpected flood in the country while infrastructure of about Rs 500 billion was damaged.

The federal government had given Rs 21 billion subsidy to the railways, even though the railways had to pay pension to its pensioners from its own earning which was actually a difficult business, he added.

He said that the earning of the railways was Rs 155 million while expenditures were Rs 190 million per day.

The minister said that the PR had moved to the Supreme Court against the ban on land utilization, adding if the ban was lifted then fine otherwise land grabbers could grab the railways land.

Talking about the Civil Aviation, the minister said that the government was out-sourcing operations of three airports according to the international model like United Kingdom, Germany, Europe, Delhi and Mumbai. He clarified that no airport was being privatised and propaganda on the issue was actual enmity with the country and damaging for the state.

The minister said that operators from Qatar, UAE and other countries

would participate in the open bidding and the airports would be outsourced on the best offer.

He said that the out-sourcing of the airports would bring foreign investment in the country.

PIA was an ill department, however, it was correctable and the current government would succeed in reviving this department, he hoped. He said that food quality in the planes was being improved. He said that seven out of 14 A3T20 aeroplanes had been made operational and likewise 10 out of 12 Boeing 777 would be operational soon. He said that work on seats and infotainment was also in progress in the aeroplanes.

He hoped that routes for 15 airports of Europe would soon be opened for the PIA and it would bring business for the airlines.

Election for Presiding Officer in 4 Abbottabad tehsils to be held on 25th

ABBOTTABAD

STAFF REPORT

Like other districts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) will hold the elections for Presiding Officer of four tehsils of Abbottabad district including Tehsil Abbottabad, Havelian, Lorra and Lower Tanawal on January 5, 2023.

According to the notification issued by the ECP on Saturday, all returning officers will call a meeting of Tehsil councils and will also issue nomination papers to the candidates at 01:00 PM on the same day.

Polling for the Presiding Officer will be held under open division and after completing the election process from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM, the Returning Officer will take oath from the successful candidate.

After the announcement of



the election schedule by ECP, all the candidates have increased their efforts to vote and support from the party leadership and councilors and a series of meetings with members of the Tehsil Council has started.

The strategy of Tehreek-e-Insaf has not yet been seen but they have claimed a surprise for the election while the leadership of PML-N including Murtaza Javed Abbasi, Sardar Aurangzeb Nalotha are openly

campaigning for their nominated candidate, Naeem Khan Chamanka, at various places.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has given complete authority and tasks to the Tehsil Chairman Havelian Atif Mansif Khan to decide on the candidate himself and they also claimed that the majority of the members of Tehsil Havelian are in contact with Chairman Atif Mansif and for the election.

No one would be allowed to hold people hostage: Commissioner Mekran

GWADAR

PPI

Commissioner Mekran Division Syed Faisal Ahmed Agha, has said that neither any operation was conducted against the leaders of Haq Du Tehreek, Gwadar nor did any revenge was taken rather a simple action was taken to clear the Express Way area of Gwadar where Haq Du Tehreek, Gwadar had staged protest sit-in, besieging staff of Customs, Gwadar Port, Navy, including foreigners.

Addressing a press conference in the office of Deputy Commissioner, Gwadar here on Saturday, he said that high level delegation had also arrived from Quetta to hold parleys with the leaders of Haq Du Tehreek, but leaders of HDT, Gwadar did not meet the delegation, adding, "Constitution of the country guarantees freedom of expression and having a meeting with anyone and the said right cannot be snatched by any officers of the department".

"No one would be allowed to hold people hostage again", said he, adding that there was no denying the fact that there were no trawlers in the maritime limits of Gwadar.

He added that it was not a right that Fisheries Department, Government of Balochistan was not taking action against illegal trawlers rather twelve trawlers had been captured during the last fifty days in different operations conducted by the staff of Fisheries Department.

He said that it was being strived to take action against illegal trawlers involved to fish illegally in the maritime limits, adding that illegal trawlers could be controlled with the help of people and fishermen.

On the occasion, Saifullah Khetran, Director General Fisheries, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Qambrani, Director General, Gwadar Development Authority, Ezat Nazeer, Deputy Commissioner, Gwadar, Najeebullah Pandrani, SSP Gwadar and other officers were also present.

BankIslami sponsors Karachi Eat Festival as exclusive banking partner

KARACHI: BankIslami, Pakistan's leading Islamic financial institution with 350+ branches in more than 123 cities is once again sponsoring Eat Festival Pakistan; being held in Karachi at Beach View Park in Clifton on 6th, 7th and 8th of January, 2023, as an exclusive banking partner. This time around, BankIslami is going massive with an exclusive pavilion, free entry for BankIslami MasterCard holders, and Branch on Wheels-ATM service! The BankIslami MasterCard holders will be granted 2 free entries by presenting their BankIslami MasterCard and CNIC at BankIslami's exclusive entrance, for a smooth and hassle-free experience. The Bank's pavilion at the festival will feature exciting activities such as a VR station, real-time One Touch Banking simulation and a 360-go-round photo station, and instant account opening through digital onboarding. Speaking about the event, BankIslami President and CEO Syed Amir Ali said, "We at BankIslami, are thrilled to welcome you all to Pakistan's biggest food festival and are proud to be associated with it for the past two years. We urge you all to eat your heart's fill and not worry about going cashless because BankIslami's Branch on Wheels-ATM service is here to serve you!" All attendees must follow COVID-19 standard operating procedures and keep their vaccination certificates and CNICs with them. PR

Training of field staff for 7th Population & Housing Digital Census begins

Training of Field Staff for 7th Population and Housing Census has started today. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) is going to conduct 7th population and housing census which will be first every digital census of Pakistan. In this connection PBS will train 1,21,000 field staff in three batches from 7th Jan, 2023 to 21st Jan, 2023 all over Pakistan at Census District level. The field staff is being trained on ethical, IT and subject matter. The main focus is on standardizing the concepts as the quality of training will ensure reliability of data collection. To achieve this target apart from conventional training and conceptual videos, real life examples casestudies, mock exercise and FAQs have also been added. To make the sessions interactive the trainer's involvement and questioning has been encouraged. Pre and Post-test and cross-questioning is also part of training. All the training venues will be physically monitored by higher management of PBS, including Chief Census Commission, Dr. Naeemuzzafar, Mr. Sarwar Gondal, Member (SS/RM), Mr. Ayazuddin Member (C & S), and team of monitors from Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), to ensure the quality of training. The trainings will assure that census field Staff is fully prepared to collect accurate and reliable data. PR



AFTER ANGRY SCENES, DIVIDED US REPUBLICANS ELECT KEVIN MCCARTHY AS HOUSE SPEAKER

WASHINGTON
AGENCIES

REPUBLICAN favorite Kevin McCarthy was finally elected speaker of the US House of Representatives on Saturday, ending a paralyzing standoff with right-wing holdouts that raised concerns about his party's ability to exercise power in Congress.

McCarthy's victory required an historic 15 rounds of voting and was only secured after a late-night session of high drama that saw Republican members almost come to blows as tempers flared.

It also required major concessions to the small group of Republican conservatives who had opposed his candidacy, and turned what should be a showcase of party unity into a days-long display of internal division.

The speaker wields key influence in Washington by presiding over House business and is second in line to the presidency, after the vice president. But McCarthy has been weakened out of the gate by the protracted election and the promises he was forced to make to hardliners, who demonstrated the leverage they hold given the Republicans' wafer-thin majority in the lower house of Congress.

The chaos and confusion, watched



with glee and contempt by Democrat rivals across the aisle, could signal years of legislative and decision-making paralysis on consequential issues for the country — and the wider world.

Heated confrontation —

As he accepted the gavel in the early hours of Saturday, McCarthy, who was backed by former president Donald Trump, outlined the Republicans' aggressive lines of attack ahead of the 2024

presidential race.

He vowed to "pass bills to fix the nation's challenges, from the wide open southern border to 'America last' energy policies, to woke indoctrination in our schools."

"America's long term challenges — the debt and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party — Congress must be with one voice on both of these issues," the 57-year-old Californian told the House.

As the 14th vote got underway before midnight Friday, McCarthy suffered a shock setback amid heated exchanges as he came up short of a majority by just one vote out of more than 400 cast.

As Matt Gaetz voted "present" to deny McCarthy, the disappointed Republican leader walked over to the Florida lawmaker-elect for face-to-face talks in the chamber. In scenes shown on live television, Gaetz pointed a finger at McCarthy, who backed off before Alabama's Mike Rogers lunged at Gaetz and had to be held back with a restraining arm across his face.

"The 'Speaker' selection process, as crazy as it may seem, has made it all much bigger and more important than if done the more conventional way," Trump chimed in on his Truth Social platform.

"Congratulations to Kevin McCarthy and our GREAT Republican Party!" added the former president who has launched his 2024 election campaign to return to White House.

Democratic President Joe Biden optimistically called for more cooperation between the two parties.

"I am prepared to work with Republicans when I can and voters made clear that they expect Republicans to be prepared to work with me," Biden said after McCarthy's victory.

WASHINGTON

REUTERS



US announces over \$3.75b in new military assistance to Ukraine



Russia insists it is observing Ukraine ceasefire despite Kyiv attacks

MOSCOW
AGENCIES

Moscow insisted Saturday its army was observing a ceasefire in Ukraine to mark Orthodox Christmas despite artillery attacks by Kyiv troops.

"Despite the shelling of the armed forces of Ukraine of settlements and Russian positions, the implementation of the declared ceasefire will be continued," the Russian defence ministry said in a statement. The statement however added that over the past 24 hours Russian forces repelled a number of attacks by the Ukrainian army in eastern Ukraine and killed dozens of its troops.

AFP journalists in the town of Chasiv Yar south of the frontline city of Bakhmut on Saturday heard heavy artillery fire for much of Saturday morning. On Saturday, the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said that Russia launched one missile strike and fired 20 rounds from multiple rocket launchers over the past 24 hours.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had unilaterally ordered his forces to pause attacks for 36 hours for the Orthodox Christmas.

Ukraine has dismissed the halt — due to last until the end of Saturday (2100 GMT) — as a tactic by Russia to gain time to regroup its forces and bolster its defences following a series of battlefield setbacks.

Orthodox Christians observe Christmas on January 7.

Iran executes two more men in connection with protests

PARIS
AFP

Iran on Saturday executed two men for killing a paramilitary force member during unprecedented protests sparked by the death in custody of a young woman.

The latest hangings double the number of executions to four over the nationwide protests, which escalated since mid-September into calls for an end to Iran's clerical regime.

Two men were put to death in December, sparking global outrage and new Western sanctions against Iran.

Judicial news agency Mizan Online reported "Mohammad Mahdi Karami and Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini, the main perpetrators of the crime that led to the martyrdom of Ruhollah Ajamian, were hanged this morning."

Prosecutors said the 27-year-old militiaman was stripped naked and killed by a group of mourners who had been paying tribute to a slain protester, Hadis Najafi.

The executions come in defiance of a campaign by international rights groups for the lives of the two men to be spared. Karami's father had also begged the judiciary not to kill his son.

Amnesty International had decried the "fast-tracked unfair group trial" of the two men which it said bore no "resemblance to a meaningful judicial proceeding".

Authorities have arrested thousands of people in the wave of demonstrations that began with the September death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22. The Iranian Kurdish woman had been arrested by morality police for allegedly breaching the regime's strict dress code for women.

FEAR FOR OTHERS

Ajamian belonged to the Basij paramilitary force linked to the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

He died in Karaj, west of Tehran, on November 3 after being attacked with "knives, stones, fists, kicks" and dragged along a street, a judiciary spokesman said at the time.

The court of first instance had sentenced Karami and Hosseini to death in early December, Mizan said.

On Tuesday, the Supreme

Court upheld the sentence.

Mahmood Amiry-Moghadam, director of Oslo-based Iran Human Rights (IHR), said both men "were subjected to torture, sentenced after sham trials... without the minimum standards for due process."

In a tweet, he said the latest executions "must have even stronger consequences" for Iran's regime and specifically urged "new and stronger sanctions against individuals and entities."

Karami's parents had in December issued a video pleading with the judiciary to spare his life.

"I respectfully ask the judiciary, I beg you please, I ask you... to remove the death penalty from my son's case," said Mashallah Karami, describing his son as a former national karate team member.



How China protects vulnerable rural areas under shadow of COVID-19

BEIJING
AGENCIES

As China's Spring Festival is coming soon, many will return to their hometowns for holidays. With the dense flow of travelers and frequent freight logistics activities, it will be a considerable test for the country to cope with a possible mass infection during the holidays. And with an undeveloped healthcare system and weak logistics distribution foundation, China's rural areas will have to suffer during the winter break.

To face up the challenges, the Chinese government is making full preparations for the possible mass infection during the upcoming Spring Festival, including measures to cope with the medical supply shortage, coordinate rural and urban medical re-

sources, and ensure severely infected people get timely treatment. The Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of the State Council (JPCMSC) on Saturday afternoon introduced the situation of China's epidemic prevention and control measures in rural areas. Officials from the National Health Commission (NHC) and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, experts and grassroots representatives attended the briefing.

HOW TO EASE MEDICINE SHORTAGE IN RURAL AREAS?

Nie Chunlei, director of the Department of Primary Health of the NHC, said that epidemic prevention and control in rural areas has always been vital. The Chinese government has made a lot of arrangements to relieve the shortage of medical supplies. The JPCMSC has set up a special sup-

porting team and established a daily dispatch system to coordinate the distribution of medicines and other key medical supplies nationwide. Currently, priority is given to rural medical institutions, ensuring they have access to medicinal products, according to Nie.

He added that the NHC has conducted a daily monitoring, reporting and dispatch system for rural health organizations such as township health centers and community clinics. Once shortages of medical supplies, especially medicines, are found, they will take prompt measures to promote local governments to solve the problem.

Nie noted that for some drugs that are in short supply, the relevant departments had formulated various policies to support enterprises to expand production capacity, and the companies are working overtime to produce

these medicines. He also encouraged rural areas to make full play of traditional Chinese medicines (TCM) if Western medicines such as febrifuge are not available at the time.

Regarding the logistics problem in rural areas, Nie said local governments should make centralized procurement to avoid one-after-another personal purchases which may cause a shortage of couriers.

"According to our monitoring, the problem of medicine shortage was prominent in the early days, but recently, with the increase of medicine production capacity and the strengthening of the organization of logistics by local governments, we found that the medicine shortage is gradually alleviating," Nie said.

HOW TO ENSURE TIMELY TREATMENT OF SEVERELY INFECTED PATIENTS IN RURAL AREAS?

To ensure efficient and orderly operation and treatment of severely infected people in rural areas, especially those with poor transportation, Nie said the State Council has guided local governments to carry out the following work. First, using all kinds of tools like telephones, WeChat, cloud service, video and door-to-door service to strengthen daily contacts with key personnel and monitor their health so that once they're found in critical conditions, measures can be taken in the early stages.

Timely treatment requires rural medical and health institutions to expand the pre-hospital first-aid force, so the central government guided all township hospitals and community health centers to be equipped with at least one ambulance and to integrate the 120 first-aid system of each county.

INSPIRED CUMMINS BOWLS AUSTRALIA INTO CONTENTION FOR SERIES WHITEWASH

SYDNEY
AFP

SKIPPER Pat Cummins bowled Australia into contention to pull off a stunning victory with a fiery spell against South Africa in an absorbing third Sydney Test on Saturday. Cummins captured three for 29 in a hostile 14 overs to set up the Australians for a dramatic final day charge for victory to complete a series clean sweep against the hapless Proteas.

At the close on day four, South Africa were batting for survival at 149 for six in reply to Australia's 475 for four declared first innings with Marco Jansen on 10 and Simon Harmer six.

The outgunned South Africans have only passed 200 once so far in this series.

The Australians need 14 more wickets to pull off an astonishing victory despite so much time lost and cannot be counted out after rocking the tourists in Saturday's two compelling sessions of the rain-marred Test.

"I'm pretty excited about tomorrow," said spinner Nathan Lyon. "It's going to



be an exciting day's cricket, we know what we have to do."

Josh Hazlewood made the initial breakthrough, removing Dean Elgar for 15 continuing the Proteas' skipper's wretched series of low scores.

Hazlewood, bowling a lively opening spell, got Elgar with a brutal short-pitched delivery which clipped his glove for a catch by wicketkeeper Alex Carey.

Lyon stunned Sarel Elwée who did

not play a shot and was bowled top of the off-stump for 18 leaving the tourists 37-2 in the 18th over.

Four balls later Cummins claimed his first victim with Heinrich Klaasen, caught off a vicious lifter leg-side by Carey for two.

Hazlewood broke through again after tea with an inswinger that kissed the edge of Temba Bavuma's bat for Carey to do the rest.

Bavuma clouted two sixes off Lyon in his 35 off 74 balls but was a big wicket for the Aussies to leave the visitors 85-4 in the 39th over.

"Reverse swing is in play, with a little bit of variable bounce, the short ball is difficult to play because of how slow it is coming off the wicket," Hazlewood said.

"I think Ash (Agar) and Gazza (Lyon), it's a big day tomorrow for them with the ball spinning with lefties and righties for them both to work with, there will be plenty happening tomorrow."

Cummins removed Khaya Zondo with a superb yorker that trapped him leg before wicket for 39 and South Africa's fifth wicket. The skipper charged in to lead the Australian bowling assault with two fearsome deliveries thudding into Marco Jansen's upper body.

Cummins quickly got another wicket, with Kyle Verreyne edging to Steve Smith at slip for 19 for Smith's 151st Test catch.

"We've just got to stick to our basics, that's what we've done over the last 10 years or so .. thrilling day tomorrow, do the basics well and see how we go," Lyon said.



Korda, Sabalenka race into Adelaide finals

ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

STAFF REPORT

Sebastian Korda booked a spot in his fifth career final Saturday, with either Novak Djokovic or Daniil Medvedev awaiting him in the Adelaide International decider.

The unseeded American, son of former world number two Petr Korda, was in charge 7-6 (7/5), 1-0 when Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka called for a medical timeout before pulling out of the match.

Nishioka received treatment on his upper right leg and was forced to retire, casting a shadow over his preparations for the Australian Open this month.

"Very excited for the way I'm playing and a lot of confidence leading into the big one (final)," said Korda, 22, who won his first and only title on clay in Parma in 2021, while making two finals last year.

"Excited to play either one (Djokovic or Medvedev). It's always a great thing to learn from different kinds of players," he said of Sunday's final.

"It's going to be a great learning experience whatever the outcome and, you know, I'm going to go for the win."

Top seed Djokovic, who has an ominous 21-1 record since September, takes on Russian third seed Medvedev in an evening semi-final. The world number five Serbian holds an 8-4 edge in their head-to-head, with 10 of the 12 showdowns coming on hard courts.

World number five Aryna Sabalenka surged into the women's final, crushing Romanian veteran Irina-Camelia Begu for the loss of just five games.

Her reward is a title-match against either world number two Tunisian Ons Jabeur or rising Czech teenager Linda Noskova as she hits her stride ahead of the opening Grand Slam of the year.

"I'm happy with the level I played today," said the Belarusian, who is targeting an 11th career title and a first since Abu Dhabi and Madrid in 2021, after winning 6-3, 6-2.

"She's playing a different style so super happy that I was able to be in the match. "We did everything right in the pre-season, I think this is the key," she added in explaining her good early-season form, where she is yet to drop a set.

Begu had beaten seventh seed Jelena Ostapenko and fourth seed Veronika Kudermetova enroute to the last four, but was no match for the power of the Sabalenka serve and her ferocious returns.



All-Attiyah retains overall lead in Dakar Rally car race

RIYADH

AGENCIES

Saudi driver Yazeed Al-Rajhi won the seventh stage of the Dakar Rally on Saturday with Qatari Nasser Al-Attiyah holding the overall lead in the car race. The motorbike stage was cancelled because of heavy rain. Toyota driver Al-Rajhi and his German co-driver Dirk von Zitzewitz mastered the testing stage in Saudi Arabia to bounce back after losing over five hours on Friday because of technical problems. Despite starting in 40th place near the back of the field, Al-Rajhi finished 8min 54sec ahead of Lithuanian driver Vaidotas Zala after the shortened 333km timed special to Al Duwadimi. The Saudi picked up his third career Dakar stage win and the first one in this year's race, but remains over five hours behind the overall leader. "I'd say I have the best co-driver," said Al-Rajhi. "We attacked. It wasn't easy to start from the back and overtake all the little cars, often going left and right in the wadis, but we did a great job." Al-Attiyah finished 14th but retains a comfortable lead of one hour and one minute in the overall race. His South African Toyota teammate Henk Lategan is second overall. France's Stephane Peterhansel, a record 14-time winner of the race, crashed out of the 2023 edition on Friday. Organisers decided Friday to cancel Saturday's motorbike stage because heavy rain had delayed the arrival of the competitors and put their safety in danger. American rider Skyler Howes is leading the motorbike category.

Babar rues winless home season

KARACHI
REUTERS

Captain Babar Azam is dejected by the team's winless home season but refuses to blame players' injuries or unresponsive pitches for their lean run.

Pakistan twice returned from the brink of defeat to force a 0-0 stalemate in the two-Test series against New Zealand, which followed a 3-0 whitewash at the hands of England last month.

They have now gone eight Tests at home without a win, which put paid to their hopes of making the World Test Championship final, and Babar conceded this was not how he expected the season to unfold.

"The Test season hasn't gone according to expectations," Babar



told a news conference after Pakistan narrowly avoided a third successive home series defeat.

"It's not an excuse but some of our players were unfit which disturbed our combination."

Their bowling unit particularly suffered.

Pace spearhead Shaheen Afridi remains sidelined with a knee injury, while fellow quick Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah missed the bulk of the series against England with niggles.

The pitches used for the series against England and New Zealand also drew flak for being too batter-friendly and Babar said it did not help their cause either.

"Of course, there's talk about the pitches, but conditions are different at every venue."

"We give our input on pitches, but you get the pitches you get, and after that, you have to execute your plans. You can't just complain about losing a match because of pitches."

"We prepared them according to our plans, but results didn't go our way."

09:00 am which will be completed in one to two hours approximately.

Participants would cover the distance of five to seven kilometers with trail or multi-terrain shoes he said adding that participants can select any route of their choice and convenience.

He informed that MTR trail runs are open to everyone and anyone can join the running events. "Participants should make sure they were fit enough to run on flat terrain, hills, mountains, trails continuously for at least one to two hours at an easy good pace" he maintained.

Answering a question, Sultan Khattak said that second round will be held on Sunday, 16th January while the concluded round would be organized on 12th February followed by the prize distribution ceremony.



male and female categories.

He informed that the winner of the series would be selected on basis of points that would be attributed to the top

20 finishers in a symmetric manner.

He said that registration of the Trail 3 race would be started at 07:00 am in the morning and race will be started at

Potter confident of support from Chelsea owners despite slump

LONDON
AFP

Graham Potter says he has the "full support" of Chelsea's owners and players as he tries to turn around the club's fortunes after a disappointing start to his tenure. Potter's side have won just one of their past eight Premier League games, slipping to a 1-0 home defeat to Manchester City at Stamford Bridge on Thursday.

Speculation is growing over the future of the former Brighton boss, who took over at Chelsea in September, but he said he did not need validation from anybody outside the club.

"The owners are billionaires so they're quite smart," he said. "Smarter than me, that's for sure. So they understand the challenges that we have

and the direction we want to go in. I've been here four months and five, six weeks of that have been lost to international football."

"I think Pep (Guardiola) was (at Manchester City) a year before they'd won anything, and then obviously Mikel (Arteta) and Jurgen (Klopp) took a bit of time. But obviously, it's maybe different for me, for some reason. But I don't put a timescale on it. I know the responsibility we have here."

"But also I know that I am capable, and I know the quality that I have and I have the full support of certainly the owners, the players and the staff here." Chelsea go head-to-head with City again on Sunday, this time at the Etihad in the FA Cup third round.

Raheem Sterling and Christian Pulisic were both forced off the pitch on Thursday, adding to

an injury nightmare Potter summarised by saying: "I've never experienced anything like it."

The pair could be added to a growing list that includes N'Golo Kante, Reece James, Wesley Fofana, Mason Mount, Ben Chilwell, Armando Broja, Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Edouard Mendy.

The Blues boss said it was unfair to judge him on a season disrupted by an injury crisis and the World Cup.

"I'm not sitting here (as) some egomaniac that has all the answers and gets everything right," he said. "Of course, that's not the case. But at the same time, there's some challenges that we face, there's some margins in the Premier League that are difficult. "We've had a massive transition — problems in terms of injuries don't make it easy to be stable."



DESPERATE TIMES, DESPERATE MEASURES: BRINGING IN DOLLARS BY ALL MEANS

SINCE MAY 1999, PAKISTAN HAS BEEN FOLLOWING A MARKET-BASED FLEXIBLE EXCHANGE RATE SYSTEM

PROFIT REPORT

ARIBA SHAHID

THE shortage of physical dollars in the country is widening the gap between the open market and the interbank. Foreign exchange companies have devised a plan to bridge the gap between the open market and interbank rate.

During a meeting with Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and Advisor Tariq Pasha, the Chairman Exchange Companies Association of Pakistan (ECAP), Malik Boston shared an idea. He said that exchange companies have decided to bring in more

dollars by making foreign trips in order to increase the domestic FX reserves, which will push the value of the rupee up.

Boston told Dar that exchange companies will ask overseas Pakistanis to help collect dollars which will then be sent back to Pakistan through official channels. According to Boston, this will help bridge the gap between the open market and the interbank that is trading at a spread of more than 10%.

Divergence explained

The growing divide in the interbank and open market rates penalizes people for using official channels to send money to Pakistan. Hawala and hundi

operators offer a better rate based on the open market rate as opposed to the interbank rate. As the open market is in a crunch for dollars, the hawala and hundi operations in the country further aggravate the supply shortage faced by it.

A reason for the growing divide between the two rates is primarily that in other countries, people only go to exchanges when they are traveling and need the other country's currency. People don't really buy and hoard physical notes of other currencies.

Logically, the open market rate increases when there is a demand for foreign exchange. This could be when

people are traveling more, going abroad to study, or even when people are trying to dollarize their savings. You might be thinking why there are two different rates. To understand this, let's look at what the interbank and open market really are and why they're two different markets.

As the name suggests, the interbank market is a market between banks. On an international level, it is a network used by financial institutions to trade currency and currency derivatives with each other. These transactions can be on behalf of third parties done through banks; however, they are primarily done for the banks themselves.

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KP tourism department fumbles funds

AFTER SPENDING MILLIONS OF RUPEES ON PARTICIPATION IN DUBAI EXPO, AUTHORITY COULD NOT ATTRACT ANY FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN TOURISM SECTOR

PROFIT

AZIZ BUNERI

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Tourism and culture authority was able to spend funds on just three annual development projects during the first six months of the current financial year.

As a result, the projects included in the provincial Annual Development Program (ADP) for the promotion of tourism are delayed. The provincial government has allocated Rs8.379 billion in the ADP for the tourism sector in the province. Till date, the authority has been able to utilize Rs 975 million from the released fund. According to the documents of the provincial Finance department, the authority has managed to spend Rs 50 million on a project under the Galiyat Development Authority and only Rs 523 million have been utilized under the integrated tourism Development project out of Rs3 billions. Similarly, Dir Development Authority has managed to utilize the entire allocated fund of Rs 395 million on the integrated tourism Development project.

State of tourism development

According to the 2021 report of the World Travel & Tourism Council, travel and tourism contributed \$8.8 billion, approximately 2.9% of total GDP of Pakistan, in 2017. By 2019, the total GDP contribution of tourism to Pakistan was \$15 billion which accounts for 5.7% of the total GDP. However, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, this growth fell significantly in 2020 by nearly 25%, falling to \$11.6 billion, or 4.4% of GDP. Similarly, jobs in the tourism industry fell 11.1% from 3.45 million in 2019 to 3.63 million in 2020. Most significant to these figures, however, is that the major contributor in this is Pakistan's domestic tourists. In fact, domestic spending on tourism accounts for 91% of total spending, and foreign tourists bring in a mere 9% of the revenue of the tourism and travel industry in Pakistan. Of this, 93% is leisure spending on travel and tourism and only 7% is for business.

This then means that the majority of the demand for tourism in the country comes from within. Nearly five million domestic tourists travel each year across Pakistan. But for all of the natural potential that Pakistan has, it lags behind in some very specific areas. According to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index developed by the World Economic Forum, Pakistan lags in all key sub-indicators with the exception of price competitiveness, which is only the result of the depreciation in the rupee. Out of a list of 141 countries, Pakistan is 130th at having an Enabling Environment, 138th on Safety and Security index, 102nd on the Health and Hygiene index, 138th on the Human Resource and Labour Market index, 123rd on Travel and Tourism Policy and Enabling Conditions, 120th on Prioritisation of Travel and Tourism by the Government, 107th on Tourism Infrastructure, and 141st out of 141 countries on the Environmental Sustainability index.

Failed projects

Among the projects where the authority failed to spent funds are capacity building project for employees of attached departments, tourism festivals, small scale Tourism Promotion, Tourism Police, renovation of Hund Park, setting up Tour Operator Facilitation Centers, development of Tourist Spots, establishment of Tourism Planning Cell, construction of Roads to Tourist Spots, setting of camping pods, construction of trek to tourist sites and construction of road to Sheikh Badin tourist site in Dera Ismail Khan.

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PM reaffirms importance Pakistan attaches to ties with Kuwait

ISLAMABAD
STAFF REPORT

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephonic conversation with the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday and discussed matters of mutual interest.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan apprised the Kuwaiti Prime Minister of the International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan, to be held in Geneva, on 9 January 2023, and requested high-level participation. The Kuwaiti PM expressed firm support for the initiatives to strengthen Pakistan's climate resilience.

The Prime Minister reaffirmed the importance Pakistan attached to its relationship with Kuwait and reiterated the desire to further expand bilateral cooperation in diverse fields. He underscored the resolve to forge deeper economic engagement between Pakistan and Kuwait – including in trade, investment, labor, and other key sectors.

The Prime Minister expressed satisfaction at the close cooperation between the two countries at the multilateral forums. He appreciated the measures taken by Kuwait for the recruitment of Pakistani manpower in the fields of health, security, and infrastructure.

The Prime Minister of Kuwait reciprocated the sentiments of the Prime Minister and reassured them of the desire of the Kuwaiti leadership to further deepen and broaden bilateral relations with Pakistan. The two leaders agreed to maintain close contact and work together on all issues of mutual interest.

The two leaders agreed to remain in close contact and take forward the process of consolidation and further expansion of Pakistan-Kuwait relations. Kuwait hosts over 100,000 strong Pakistani diaspora which is contributing significantly in the development and progress of both nations.

'PAKISTAN TO COMPLETE TERMS OF IMF'S PROGRAMME'

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said that he had told the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) about the government's resolve to complete the terms of the IMF's programme. On his Twitter handle, the prime minister said that he had held a telephonic conversation with the IMF MD yesterday. "Also explained Pakistan's economic difficulties especially after the devastating floods. IMF delegation will come to Pakistan soon," he added in a tweet.

'NATION TO ALWAYS REMAIN INDEBTED TO SACRIFICES OF ITS SHUHADA'

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said that the Pakistani nation would always remain grateful to the sacrifices of its shuhada and their families.

On his Twitter handle, the prime minister said that due to the sacrifices of Shaheed Naseer Sadiq and Shaheed Nasir Abbas, the nefarious designs of the enemies of Pakistan had been foiled.

The prime minister, in a tweet in Urdu language, referred to his yesterday's visit to the bereaved family of late Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director Naseer Sadiq and said that he paid tribute to shaheed director on his behalf and on the behalf of the entire nation.

Will not let 'imported rulers' run away from election: Imran

LAHORE
STAFF REPORT

Former prime minister and Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan has reiterated that they would not let the 'incumbent imported rulers' run away from holding elections in the country. The former premier made these remarks while chairing a meeting of Punjab ministers.

During the meeting, Imran Khan instructed the lawmakers to start preparations for vote of confidence in Punjab Assembly and subsequent general polls. Speaking on the occasion, the PTI Chief said they would not let the 'incumbent imported rulers' run away from holding elections in the country.

"After Islamabad, the incumbent government was trying to run away from Karachi's local government (LG) elections", he added. The former prime minister further said that the people of Pakistan had rejected the 'imported rulers', reiterating that following the vote of confidence in Punjab Assembly, they will start campaigning for the election. "The only solution to the country's prevailing challenges is immediate and transparent elections," he said, adding that a government with a fresh mandate can solve the country's problems.

Last year was brutal for startups. This year might be even more so

LAST QUARTER PREVIOUS YEAR RECORDED LOWEST AMOUNT OF FUNDING DURING PAST FOUR YEARS

PROFIT REPORT

TAIMOOR HASSAN

The year 2022 was brutal for Pakistan. Political and constitutional chaos, double-digit inflation, the rising dollar, reserves reaching record lows and talks about the country defaulting on its debt obligations were the highlights of the year. To top it off, Pakistan's IT sector, which was widely perceived as an engine that would drive the country's economic growth, posted sluggish development.

There is a fall in the growth rate of Pakistan's IT export-based remittances and then the startup sector, which had brought in amounts north of \$380 million in 2021, saw this growth slashed in 2022. The year ended with a total of \$355 million raised in disclosed funding across 57 deals by Pakistan's startups in 2022, according to data compiled by VC and insights firm i2i Ventures.

The last quarter of Q4 of the previous year recorded the lowest amount of funding during the last four years, raising only \$15 million according to i2i. This was 78% down, compared to the same quarter last year. Quarter on quarter growth fell consistently last year. In Q1 of 2022, startups raised \$172 million across 22 deals, which fell to

\$102 million across 15 deals in the next quarter. In Q3 of 2022, startups raised \$65 million across 14 deals with the last quarter of the year only accounting for the remaining \$15 million out of the total \$355 raised during the entire year.

Fintech and ecommerce were the top performing sectors in 2022. Ecommerce startups managed to raise the highest amount of funding, raking in \$185 million. Notable raises were by Bazaar which announced a \$70 million raise, Dastgyr did \$37 million whereas Jugnu announced closing a \$22.5 million round. On the fintech side, startups raised \$101 million across 15 deals, compared to 13 deals in the ecommerce segment.

According to Data Darbar, a startups insights firm, Series A funding recorded the highest funding value of \$133.5 million in 2022, followed by seed funding at \$83.35 million and Series B funding at \$80 million. On the other hand, most of the deal activity remained concentrated in the initial stages: 19 pre-seed rounds and 18 seed rounds.

Last year also witnessed some of the biggest casualties in Pakistan's startup ecosystem. One of the biggest and most prominent startups, Airlift, ceased operations in the middle of last year.

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Fawad: former army chief Bajwa behind Imran ouster — 'actively involved'

ISLAMABAD

STAFF REPORT

Qamar Javed Bajwa, former head of the army, was among "some army generals" who played an "active part" from behind the scenes to remove the government of Imran Khan in April last year through a contentious confidence vote marred by allegations of military involvement, claimed a top leader of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

Fawad Chaudhry, senior vice president of the opposition party, told host Stephen Sackur of HARDtalk during an interview for BBC that the vote that ousted him in April was part of a US-backed plot supported by the military, despite the General Headquarters' (GHQ) repeated denial of the claim. And though this election marked a transition of power from one civilian government to another — a success story by Pakistan's democratic standards — it had the fingerprints of military meddling all over it.

"In that conspiracy [against Khan], some army generals were involved, there is no doubt about that [...] and the establishment actually played a very active role in the ouster of Imran Khan," Chaudhry said.

"In fact, the last army chief was [also] actively involved in sending our government home."

The military was also influencing the political parties allied with the PTI — Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) — during its years in government, he said.

Sackur also asked the former minister about the unprecedented October press conference of in-

telligence chief, Lt. Gen. Nadeem Anjum, in which he and then-chief spokesperson of the army, Lt. Gen. Babar Iftikhar, accused Khan of asking the military for "illegal and unconstitutional" support for his government.

Khan's criticism "is because the military and its chief refused to do illegal or unconstitutional things," Gen. Anjum said, adding the military had made a policy decision to stay out of politics, and hence turned down his persistent requests.

The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general, however, did not specify what Khan's requests were. Chaudhry responded by saying "the current [army] leadership has just assumed the office and we are hoping there will be a change in the policy, but the last chief was not talking the truth when he said we asked [for their] help. We only asked for their neutrality [in political affairs]."

He also dismissed the impression the PTI was against the institution of the military, insisting the party was "not against anyone".

"In Pakistan, unelected institutions such as the judiciary and the military [have] exercised their powers beyond [the provision of] Constitution [in the past], which is known to everyone," he said.

Throwing light on PTI's position on Pakistan's troubled relationship with the United States, he expressed a willingness to work with Washington. He expressed hope the United States too would like to have a rapport with the nation's most popular party.

Khan's popularity has often surged because of his anti-Washington rhetoric. But Chaudhry said no party in Pakistan wanted a confrontation with Washington nor has PTI ever conveyed such an intent.