

PMDC to enlist food supplements, vitamins and nutritional products

Govt bans doctors from prescribing food supplements, vitamins

BY ARIF RANA

February 14: The federal government has banned doctors from prescribing vitamins and food supplements and ordered concerned authorities to take action in case any physician is found involved in violation of the orders.

The Federal government has notified new rules in this regard. The federal cabinet had approved banning the doctors from prescribing food supplements and vitamins in its meeting held on February 6, 2025. The notification in this regard issued on February 13 said "In pursuance to the Federal Cabinet decision in its meeting held on 6 February, 2024, following actions with respect to sale, dispensing, prescription and enlistment/registration of vitamins, multi-vitamins, minerals, food supplements, nutritional products and health & Over the Counter (OTC) products are to be taken:

Pakistan Medical & Dental Council is directed to prohibit prescription of all vitamins, multi-vitamins, minerals and health & over the counter products by physicians/doctors/medical & dental practitioners and to take all necessary steps forthwith including amendment. If any, in code of practice and ethics for the

medical and dental practitioners under section 47 of Pakistan Medical and Dental Council Act, 2023 (Act No. IV of 2023).

i. All provincial health departments and Islamabad Capital Territory Administration are directed to prohibit dispensing of the above mentioned products at pharmacies/ medical stores and take all necessary steps including amendments, if any, in relevant rules to ensure that these products are sold over segregated & self-service shelves along with products of personal/ healthcare. It is to be ensured that all established pharmacies must have a qualified pharmacist at the counter.

ii. All Provisional Healthcare Commissions and Islamabad Healthcare Regulatory Authority (IHRA) are directed to ensure compliance of code of practice and ethics for the medical and dental practitioners.

iv. Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) is directed to register or enlist vitamins, multi-vitamins, minerals and health & over the counter products according to best global practices. DRAP will also coordinate with provincial health authorities to ensure prohibition of dispensing of vitamins, multi-vitamins, minerals and health & over the counter

products and ensure sale of these products over segregated and self-service shelves along with products of personal/healthcare care on pharmacies/medical stores.

2. All concerned are to submit compliance report of the decision of the Federal Cabinet within fourteen days of issuance to this notification".

The caretaker government decision to ban doctors from prescribing supplements, vitamins and nutritional products will end a curse in Pakistan and protect patients from getting supplements, vitamins like medicines. In Pakistan doctors are unnecessarily putting financial burden on the patients by prescribing food supplements, vitamins and nutritional products. The caretaker government's decision will end doctors' supplements / vitamins producer nexus and save patients from their lust of making money at the cost of their lives.

Murad Ali Shah emerges strongest candidate for Sindh CM slot

KARACHI, Feb 14 (NNI): Murad Ali Shah has emerged as the strongest candidate for the Chief Ministership of Sindh.

Sources said Shah was likely to be elected as chief minister of Sindh for the third time.

On the other hand, former provincial minister Sharjeel Memon and Nasir Hussain Shah are also racing for the slot.

The sources said Sohail Anwar Sial might also be the part of the Sindh Cabinet while members from the previous cabinet might also be get ministerial offices.

The Pakistan People Party (PPP) is in strong position with 84 seats in Sindh and the MQM has grabbed second position with 28 seats in Sindh Assembly. NNI



Israeli soldiers operate inside the Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel.

PML-N, PPP resolve to speed up govt formation process

LAHORE, Feb 14 (NNI): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) resolved on Wednesday to speed up government formation process.

The leaders of PML-N and PPP held the first committee meeting for take up matters in line with the formation of the new government.

Prominent among those who attended the committee meeting on behalf of the PML-N were Ishaq Dar, Ayaz Sadiq, Azam Nazeer

Tarar, and Malik Ahmed Khan.

Murad Ali Shah, Qamar Zaman Kaira, Murad Ali Shah, and Saeed Ghani were among those who represented the PPP in the committee.

The proposals will be organised by the committee and set to the leadership of both parties.

Moreover, the leadership will take the final decision regarding the proposals of the committee. Separately, the PML-N

today had decided to field the defeated candidates in the upcoming by-elections.

Sources divulged that the PML-N had decided to field Khawaja Saad Rafique, Rana Sanaullah, and Ali Pervaiz Malik in the by-elections.

Moreover, PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif will supervise Shehbaz Sharif in the centre and Punjab.

Nawaz Sharif will make the decision regarding his NA seat after consultation. NNI

Historical move as Maryam Nawaz set to become Punjab's first woman CM

LAHORE, Feb 14 (NNI): As the decision to nominate to Maryam Nawaz for the Punjab CM slot has been made by the PM L-N

supremo Nawaz Sharif, a unique history is going to be made.

She endured the hardships of political victimisation and imprisonment in the past few years to get to this position.

Her political strategy as well as way to conduct herself is also regarded well by the citizens as she is also known as the 'crowdpuller' who attracted a large number of people during the electoral campaigns.

Her international fame can be gauged from the fact the she was included in the 100 most influential

women of the world in 2017, according to the BBC report.

She decided to pursue aggressive politics after the Panama decision and presented her case before the people with a tone of courage and bravery.

When put into prison, she refused to take B-class facilities and preferred to be imprisoned like ordinary prisoners.

She was appointed in charge of PM Youth Program in 2013 and she gave laptops and scholarships to the young lot and played an important role in popularizing the party.

In the 2018 elections, she was given a ticket for the National and Provincial Assembly, but she was sentenced to seven years

in the Avenfield reference.

She also kept the party intact during the PTI government and guided her party to victory in many important by elections.

Faced with a ban on broadcasting of her speeches, she decided to take out rallies across the country and challenge the government at the time.

In recognition of Maryam Nawaz's abilities and leadership, the party leadership appointed her as the chief organizer and senior vice president.

After the elections 2024, the party leadership nominated Maryam Nawaz as the Punjab CM and with this, the new political history of Pakistan and Punjab is going to be made. NNI

Short-term Hajj facility introduced for intended pilgrims: Religious minister

BY NEWS DESK

LAHORE, Feb 14 (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed has announced that this year's Hajj is set to be optimal for Pakistani pilgrims, offering unprecedented facilities. He introduced a short-term Hajj facility for the first time, marking a notable milestone in the nation's history.

Addressing the start of the training session for pilgrims at Darul Hajj Haji Camp on Wednesday, he announced that during Hajj, all women would receive Abayas, adorned with the Pakistani flag. Selected through a transparent system, the minister said fortunate pilgrims were chosen via a draw, and their training began on February 12. He said that Hajj pilgrims were the guests of Allah and a true ambassador of Pakistan, which would be facilitated with advance faculties. He said that when he took charge of the ministry, it was made clear that in 2024, Pakistani pilgrims would be provided with the best facilities. This year's Hajj would be exemplary for Pakistani pilgrims, offering facilities that were not available in the past.

The minister highlighted the comprehensive efforts made by the ministry regarding Hajj arrangements, collaborating with Saudi Arabia during a visit to assess the facilities, provided to pilgrims. He mentioned that accommodations, meals, and transportation, along with all basic necessities, had been standardised.

PTI-backed candidate joins PPP after win

KARACHI, Feb 14 (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed candidate Aijaz Khan Swati who emerged victorious from PS-88 Malir in the General Elections 2024 has announced to join the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

In a video message, Aijaz Khan Swati said that he is joining the PPP unconditionally, hoping that the Bilawal-led party would sincerely work for the betterment and welfare of his constituents. "I am joining the PPP for the sake of my constituents," he added.

PTI-backed Aijaz Khan Swati clinched the victory from PS-88 with 17580 votes, followed by PPP's Muzammil Shah who got 12762 votes.

SECP continues crack down on illegal personal loan apps

Action against 8 more illegal loan apps

BY HASAN RASHID

ISLAMABAD, February 14, 2024: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) constantly monitors social media and websites for any illegal personal loan Apps (illegal apps) in order to safeguard the public from illicit loan sharks. Eight (8) further illicit apps have been identified by SECP. These apps were being distributed to the public as Android Package Kit (APK) files via various APK websites, emails, and social media.

SECP has already initiated actions against these illegal apps in coordination with Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA). The SECP has so far blocked 132 illegal apps in active collaboration with Google, Apple, FIA and PTA. The coordinated efforts made by SECP, Google, FIA and PTA have forced operators of illegal apps to divert their activities to APK websites, social media, etc. These illegal apps pose sig-

nificant risks to user's safety including misuse of personal information/sensitive financial data, fraud, blackmailing/harassment etc.

THE SECP WARNS THE GENERAL PUBLIC NOT TO DOWNLOAD ILLEGAL APPS FROM ANY WEBSITE OR LINKS SHARED THROUGH ANY OTHER SOURCE LIKE EMAIL OR SOCIAL MEDIA.

An updated list of Illegal Apps, as identified by SECP and reported to respective app stores, PTA and FIA, is placed on SECP website for information of public. The General Public is advised to only download SECP approved personal loan apps THAT ARE ONLY AVAILABLE on official app stores of Google and Apple. The list of SECP approved personal loan apps is also available on SECP Website for convenience of the general public. The list of illegal apps can be found at https://www.secp.gov.pk/document/list-of-illegal-digital-apps/?w_pdmtdl=49188&refresh=65cc67f103e171707894769.

PPP denies Asif Zardari-Marwat contact

KARACHI, Feb 14 (NNI): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) denied any communication between former president Asif Ali Zardari and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Sher Afzal Marwat.

PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat earlier claimed that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari

contacted him, last night.

In response to Marwat's statement, PPP spokesperson stated that the party's co-chairman talked about letting the PTI-backed independent candidates form government. However, Zardari has already announced to vote in favor of PML-N for the Prime Ministerial slot.

The official statement further clarified that Asif Zardari engages in discussions with serious members of political parties, hence Marwat's statement should not be taken seriously.

Earlier, Sher Afzal Marwat said while talking to newsmen in Islamabad that 'Asif Zardari contacted him last night around 11 pm through

few people.'

Marwat revealed that the former president said PTI is their priority for forming government in centre, not Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

The PTI leader said he informed party's leadership after establishment of contact with the PPP leadership.

JUI announces nationwide movement against 'rigged' elections

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) has rejected the results of the 2024 general elections, alleging that they were rigged and manipulated by global forces.

JUI chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman announced a nationwide movement to protest against the 'unfair' and 'unconstitutional' elections, which he said broke the rigging record of 2018.

Addressing a news conference in Islamabad,

Maulana Fazlur Rehman said that the JUI did not accept the legitimacy of the Parliament, which he claimed had lost its importance and relevance.

He said that the JUI would participate in the assemblies with reservations, but warned that the decisions would not be made in the house but in the field. He said that the elections were rigged and JUI was defeated at the behest of global forces, who wanted to impose their

agenda on Pakistan.

"Defeating the JUI-F through poll rigging was a conspiracy of anti-Islamic elements. Our fault is that we played our role in mending the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is not acceptable to the US.

"Our fault is that we spoke up against Israeli action in Gaza and supported Hamas," Fazl stated.

He added that the JUI-F was an ideological force and would not compromise on

any of its ideological stances. "Our workers are determined to start a movement based on our history and sacrifices. If the establishment believes that elections were free and fair, then that means the army's May 9 statement has been buried," Fazl alleged.

He said that his party's crime was that it supported Palestine and opposed Israel. He also said that he will call general meetings of all the four provinces to consult with his workers

and prepare them for the movement.

He said that the JUI-F would not forge an alliance with any party.

Responding to a question about the voting Shehbaz Sharif, Maulana Fazlur Rehman said that they were not allies of the government.

He invited Nawaz Sharif, the leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), to come and sit in the opposition and join hands with him.

NDRMF concludes capacity buildup of FIPs amid diversification of Fund's portfolio

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): The National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF) on Wednesday successfully concluded its two-day third Accreditation Workshop intended to ensure capacity buildup of its fund implementing partners (FIPs) amid diversification of the Fund's portfolio on accreditation criteria and project proposal development.

The NDMRF third Accreditation Workshop was in time step as there was need to update its accreditation criteria to cater the Fund's current mandate due to diversification of its portfolio and based on lesson learnt during execution of Phase-I and project grant financing.

The workshop was organized on backdrop of initiation of phase -II of NDRMF funding, to help achieve an enhanced level of coordination, involvement and capacity building of the prospective FIPs for accreditation application, understanding of the fund's proposal format and related documentation.

Addressing the inaugural session, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), NDRMF, Bilal Anwar said the workshop was an exercise to calibrate ideas and thinking with the FIPs or partner organisation to fill the gaps.

He said the repurposing and redefining goal of the NDRFM was driven by the

challenges faced by the country in the realm of disaster risk reduction, climate change, disaster risk management and others.

The achievements made by the Fund so far was being made in collaboration with the FIPs and it was important and required as structural work needed both physical work like building small dams, early warning systems, and address slow onset disasters like drought, malnutrition and food security, he added.

"Climate change is bringing a new dimension of it and climate change is kind of a menace faced by the country that would become adverse in the future," he said.

In the past few months, he said the Fund did a stocktaking of the previous orders of NDRMF and its overall performance which helped it come up with a few ticket items incorporated in its draft Business Policy being prepared.

He provided a brief overview of the policy stating that disaster management was going to remain a major component of the disaster risk reduction work done by the fund which would make it more dependent on the expertise of the FIPs in this regard due to their assets and footprint extended to the remotest areas and communities of the country that were not accessible by the fund.

25 students complete internship program with Islamabad Capital Police

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): 25 students from Capital University of Science and Technology (CUST) completed their internship with the Islamabad capital police traffic division, a police public relations officer said.

He said that, following the directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police are acquainting citizens and students about traffic rules through various programs. Under one such program, a batch of students from CUST University completed their internship.

During the internship program, the students were briefed and given awareness about various tasks including radio pro-

duction, technical issues, live broadcasting, road safety workshops, road safety seminars, driving license issuing procedure and road duty.

Certificates were distributed among the students and hoped that they would further educate and brief their fellows and family members about road safety rules and play their role in disciplinary traffic system. Those completing such programs with the Islamabad capital police were brand ambassadors and were entrusted with the task to cooperate in ensuring a safe road environment in the city.

Such programs aim to promote public policing, develop the skills of the youth and bridge the gap between the public and the police. NNI



ISLAMABAD: The signing ceremony of MoU between the Stakeholders on Consortium Formation for Machike-Thallian-Tarujabba White Oil Pipeline Project at SIFC Secretariat, PM Office.

Campaign for registration of house servants and tenants data in full swing

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): Following the special orders of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police "Knock the Door" campaign for the registration of employees and tenants is in full swing, a public relations officer said.

He said that, during this campaign various teams of Islamabad Capital Police are going to the streets and door-to-door to ensure the registration of tenants and domestic workers as well as to inquire about the problems faced by the citizens.

In this regard, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Islamabad has registered a data of 1235 tenants and house servants of 3,097 houses from Khanna and Phulgrah Police Station jurisdiction.

The purpose of this campaign is to avoid any untoward incident by maintaining law and order in the federal capital adding that the registration of tenants and domestic workers could not only keep a close watch on miscreants but also prevent the elements involved in any kind of suspicious activity.

He said citizens are also requested that they can ask for the identity of a person if someone dressed in civil clothes comes to their house in order to collect the data.

Unregistered employees and tenants could be involved in serious incidents like theft and robbery by impersonating as a common citizen and Islamabad Capital Police is trying to provide a safe environment to the citizens of the federal capital by using all its resources. NNI

18 outlaws arrested; drugs and weapons recovered

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): Islamabad Capital Police apprehended 18 outlaws from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered drugs and weapons from their possession, a public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city.

Following these directions, the Aabpara police team arrested an accused namely Aneel Shoukat and recovered 15 liters of liquor from his possession. The Margalla police team arrested two accused namely

Haider and Muhammad Azhar and recovered one 30 bore pistol and one dagger from their possession.

Likewise, the Karachi Company police team arrested an accused namely Qasir Yaqoob and recovered 20 liters liquor from his possession, while the police team also arrested an accused namely Noman Fayyaz involved in illegally gas refilling. The Golra police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Saleem and recovered 210 gram heroin from his possession.

Similarly, the Tarnol police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Zawar and recovered one 30 bore pistol from his possession. The Sanghani police team arrested two

accused namely Abrar Ahmed and Umer Zaman and recovered two 30 bore pistols from their possession. The Industrial Area police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Azam and recovered 20 liters of liquor from his possession.

Moreover, the Sabzi Mandi police team arrested an accused namely Gul Habib and recovered 670 gram hashish from his possession. The Noon police team arrested two accused namely Khurram Ejaz and Muhammad Ibrahim and recovered two 30 bore pistols from their possession. The Bani Gala police team arrested an accused namely Bilal Akhlaq and recovered one 30 bore pistol from him. Furthermore, the Khanna

police team arrested three accused namely Abdul Azam, Muhammad Saad and Noor Hassan and recovered two 30 bore pistols and one dagger from their possession. The Humak police team arrested an accused namely Abdul Qadir and recovered one dagger from his possession.

Cases have been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway.

ICCP Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan directed the police officials to further intensify the crackdown against the criminal elements. "Safety and security of the citizens is our foremost priority and no laxity will be tolerated in this regard", he maintained. NNI

Capital Police ensuring foolproof security arrangements in High Security Zone

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): Following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police is using all available resources to ensure the peace and tranquility within the federal capital, a public relations officer said.

He said that the Islamabad Capital Police ensured data registration, identification documents and effective search of citizens entering the high security zone on a regular basis. Moreover, action against 1491 vehicles and 432 motor-

cyclists over traffic rules violations on various checkpoints of high security zone was also taken.

During the last week, the Islamabad Capital Police removed tinted glasses and fancy number plates from 1414 vehicles, impounded 77 vehicles without documents.

Strict directions have been issued to police officers and officials performing their duties in high security zone checkpoints to exercise their duty with full responsibility. The protection of important public and private property and embassies located in the high security zone is of

paramount importance.

The police officials were further directed to ensure the data entry of all citizens entering the high security zone, the identification documents should be thoroughly scrutinized, all suspicious vehicles should be searched and a positive attitude should be taken towards the public.

Citizens are requested to dial "Pucar-15" or report via the "ICT-15 App" regarding any suspicious person or activity. Protection of life and property of citizens is among the top priorities of the Islamabad Capital Police. NNI

PML-N looks to form govt in Balochistan

QUETTA, Feb 14 (NNI): The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was looking to form its government in Balochistan.

According to details, the PML-N leaders called on political leaders from different parties on Wednesday. The PML-N had also speeded up contacts with the victorious independent candidates.

Expressing his thoughts, former Balochistan chief minister Jam Kamal said: "The PML-N had obtained 10 seats in Balochistan." "We will pave the way for the development of Balochistan," Kamal stated.

Earlier today, the PML-N had decided to field the defeated candidates in the upcoming by-elections.

PUC commends institutions for ensuring law and order during elections

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): Prime Minister's Special Representative on Religious Affairs and Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Muslim Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Wednesday commended the significant role of all institutions, including the Pakistan Army, security agencies, and police for their efforts in ensuring law and order, especially during the recently general elections held on February 8, across the nation.

Addressing a joint press conference along with other prominent religious scholars and leaders, he acknowledged that despite

attempts by adversaries to disrupt the peaceful conduct of elections, their efforts had been thwarted, leading to successful completion of the electoral process.

Ashrafi who is also the chairman of Pakistan Ulama Council said in light of the current political and religious landscape, there was a pressing call for unity among Pakistan's political and religious factions to strengthen the nation. He, acknowledging election results in both victories and defeats, emphasized on utilizing legal channels such as the Election Commission of Pakistan and courts to address griev-

ances and ensure fairness.

Ashrafi urged major political parties to come together to create an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation and dialogue. He, emphasizing the importance of maintaining peace and stability within the country, announced that a high-level delegation from the Pakistan Ulama Council would engage with all major political parties to foster understanding and cooperation.

Ashrafi also urged the leadership of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, to prioritize national stability and engage in dialogue for the greater good of the country.



FAISALABAD: A large number of people standing in queue outside Police Service Center to get their driving license at D-Ground.

Indonesia counts votes in presidential race amid calls for clean election

Indonesian authorities were counting votes cast on Wednesday in the world's biggest single-day election, headlined by the race to succeed President Joko Widodo, whose influence could determine who takes the country's helm.

The race to replace Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, pits two former governors, Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan, against controversial frontrunner Prabowo Subianto, the defence minister and a former special forces commander feared in the 1990s as a top lieutenant of Indonesia's late strongman ruler Suharto.

Initial indications of the result are expected to emerge later on Wednesday, based on independent pollsters' 'quick counts' of publicly counted votes from a sampling of stations across the country. In previous elections, the unofficial counts have proven to be accurate.

Election laws prohibit publication of quick counts before 0800 GMT. The General Election Commission is expected to announce official results by March 20 at the latest.

All eyes are on the presidential race and the fate of the Jokowi's plans to establish the country as an electric vehicle hub and extend a massive infrastructure push, including a multi-billion dollar plan to move the capital city.

Two surveys last week projected Prabowo, who has promised to continue Jokowi's programmes, will

win the majority of votes and avoid a second round.

Those surveys showed Prabowo with 51.8 per cent and 51.9pc support, with Anies and Ganjar 27 and 31 points adrift, respectively. To win outright, a candidate needs over 50pc of votes and to secure 20pc of the ballot in half of the country's provinces.

Novan Maradona, 42, an entrepreneur, said after voting in central Jakarta he wanted a candidate who would continue policies currently in place.

"If we start over from zero, it will take time," he said.

Indonesia has three time zones and most polling stations across the country had closed by 0600 GMT.

Voting got off to a slow start in Jakarta, with thunderstorms causing flooding in parts of the capital. About 70 polling stations were affected, but it was not clear whether any delays would impact turnout. Turnout in past elections has been about 75pc.

Some polling stations in Central Java and Bali were decked out in pink and white Valentine's Day decorations, while others in West Java province handed out fruit to waiting voters.

Call for clean election

Undecided voters will be critical to former Jakarta governor Anies and ex-Central Java governor Ganjar, to try to force a runoff in June between the top two finishers.

"I want to underline that we want honest and fair elections so that it becomes

peaceful," Anies said at a polling station.

Deadly riots broke out after the 2019 election, when Prabowo, who has run previously for president, had initially contested Jokowi's victory.

Some 200,000 security personnel are on guard.

"So far, the situation is safe, under control," said National Police Chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo. "We will keep monitoring until the voting process is done and we are prepared for any impact after the voting."

Anies has campaigned on promises of change and preventing a backsliding in the democratic reforms achieved in the 25 years since the end of Suharto's authoritarian, kleptocratic rule.

Ganjar hails from the Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle, of which Jokowi is ostensibly a member, and has campaigned largely on continuing the president's policies, but crucially lacks his endorsement.

Before voting, he also called for a clean election so that candidates could accept the result.

Prabowo said on Wednesday he hoped the "voting process goes well".

The defence minister is contesting his third election after twice losing to Jokowi, who is tacitly backing his former rival, seen as a continuity candidate to preserve his legacy, including a role for his son as Prabowo's running mate.

During his decade in office, Jokowi pushed to



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi performs a Hindu water ritual, as he attends the inauguration of the BAPS Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Gaza truce talks open as Erdogan due in Cairo today

CAIRO: Officials from the US, Egypt, Israel and Qatar met in Cairo on Tuesday in another bid to agree a Gaza truce as calls grew for Israel to hold back on a planned assault on the enclave's southernmost city, crammed with over a million displaced people.

Renewed efforts were underway to secure a truce in a war whose impact has rippled across the Middle East. Egypt's state-linked Al Qahera News said talks had begun involving US, Qatari, Egyptian and Israeli officials.

CIA director William Burns met Mossad chief David Barnea in Cairo for a new round of talks on a Qatari-brokered plan to temporarily halt fighting in exchange for Hamas freeing hostages. The two intelligence chiefs were joined by Qatar's prime minister and Egyptian officials, while Turkish President is due in Cairo for talks on Wednesday (today).

A Palestinian official said, "The sides are looking for a formula that will be acceptable to Hamas, who says it is only possible to sign a deal once it is based on an Israeli commitment to ending its war and pulling out its forces from Gaza."

A proposal thrashed out with Israeli negotiators in Paris last month has gone back and forth between the two sides.

"Hamas and the [other] factions are awaiting the outcome of the Cairo meetings, and Hamas is open to discussing any initiative that achieves an end to aggression and war," a Hamas official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Modi opens grand Hindu temple in UAE as election nears

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened a grand Hindu temple in the United Arab Emirates on Wednesday, capping off a two-day visit to the Muslim nation that is home to around 3.5 million Indians.

A day earlier, tens of thousands of Indians filled a soccer stadium in the capital Abu Dhabi, cheering on Modi who is seeking a rare third term in India's upcoming general election.

Modi's visit to one of India's largest trading partners showed how the Hindu nationalist has deepened New Delhi's relations with the Middle East.

At home, critics say that since Modi took the prime minister's office in 2014, religious polarisation has risen and that Indian Muslims, who make up 14 per cent of the 1.42 billion population, are being marginalised.

The opening of the temple in a Muslim country has garnered widespread domestic press coverage in India and follows last month's opening by Modi of a massive temple in India built on the site of a 16th-century mosque destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992.

The UAE government gifted the 27 acres in Abu Dhabi where the grand temple was built at a cost of about \$95 million by the Hindu BAPS organisation that was founded in Modi's home state of Gujarat more than a century ago.

Hindu temples have for decades existed in the UAE, a Gulf state whose 1m citizens are a minority in a country of some 10m residents who are the backbone of the workforce. Accompanied by Hindu

religious leaders and monks, Modi offered prayers and performed rituals as he toured the temple in an event that was attended by members of the UAE government, Bollywood actors and the Indian community.

"This temple is a symbol of the shared heritage of humanity. It is a symbol of the mutual love between the Indian and Arab people. It reflects the philosophical connection between India and the UAE," Modi said to a crowd waving UAE and Indian flags.

UAE Minister of Tolerance Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, addressing the inauguration ceremony, praised Modi for strengthening relations and said the temple reflected the UAE's openness to different religions and ethnicities.

Close partners The opening of the first traditional, stone-carved Hindu temple on the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam, is symbolic of the close ties between India and the UAE.

Modi thanked UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, whom he refers to as his brother, for granting permission to build the temple.

India's relationship with the influential Middle Eastern state, built on more than a century of trade links, has expanded since Modi took office.

The two countries signed a series of agreements during the visit, including a framework accord on developing a sea and rail trade corridor from India, across the Arabian Sea, to the UAE and through Middle Eastern states, including Israel, to Europe.

"This visit is more about consolidating an already very strong legacy in the Middle East," said Harsh V Pant of the Indian think tank Observer Research Foundation.

The opening of the temple showed how Modi conducts foreign policy on his own terms and has taken the message of a culturally embedded Hinduism in Indian politics overseas, he said.

Modi is widely popular among his Hindu-majority base who see the leader, who has established a strong man image at home and among world leaders, as leading a Hindu reawakening in India.

Indian Muslims accuse Modi's right-wing nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of imposing laws interfering with their faith. Modi denies this but the situation has led to sporadic violence between members of the two communities.

The seven emirates of the UAE are represented by the seven spires of the Abu Dhabi temple, which was built with sandstone from India's Rajasthan and marble from Italy.

Hindu deities are depicted along with ancient civilisations and other religions, including Islam, the only official religion of the Gulf state.

Pujya Brahmavihari Swami, a Hindu religious leader from the temple, told Reuters that the Abu Dhabi temple was a symbol of harmony of all religions.

"This is a place where art is ageless. Culture is borderless and values are timeless. It is founded on universal spiritual values," he said ahead of its opening.



An election official tallies ballots at a polling station during Indonesia's presidential and legislative elections in Timika, Central Papua.

Microsoft says it caught hackers from China, Russia, Iran using its AI tools

State-backed hackers from Russia, China, and Iran have been using tools from Microsoft-backed OpenAI to hone their skills and trick their targets, according to a report published on Wednesday.

Microsoft said in its report it had tracked hacking groups affiliated with Russian military intelligence, Iran's Revolutionary Guard, and the Chinese and North Korean governments as they tried to perfect their hacking campaigns using large language models.

Those computer programmes, often called artificial intelligence, draw on massive amounts of text to generate human-sounding responses. The company announced the find as it rolled out a blanket ban on state-backed hacking groups using its AI products.

there's any violation of the law or any violation of terms of service, we just don't want those actors that we've identified that we track and know are threat actors of various kinds we don't want them to have access to this technology," Microsoft Vice President for Customer Security Tom Burt told Reuters in an interview ahead of the report's release.

Russian, North Korean, and Iranian diplomatic officials didn't immediately return messages seeking comment on the allegations.

China's US embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said it opposed "groundless smears and accusations against China" and advocated for the "safe, reliable and controllable" deployment of AI technology to "enhance the common well-being of all mankind."

backed hackers have been caught using AI tools to help boost their spying capabilities is likely to underline concerns about the rapid proliferation of the technology and its potential for abuse.

Senior cybersecurity officials in the West have been warning since last year that rogue actors were abusing such tools, although specifics have, until now, been thin on the ground.

"This is one of the first, if not the first, instances of an AI company coming out and discussing publicly how cybersecurity threat actors use AI technologies," said Bob Rotsted, who leads cybersecurity threat intelligence at OpenAI.

OpenAI and Microsoft described the hackers' use of their AI tools as "early-stage" and "incremental."

Burt said neither had seen cyber spies make any breakthroughs.

"We really saw them just using this technology like any other user," he said.

The report described hacking groups using the large language models differently. Hackers alleged to working on behalf of Russia's military spy agency, widely known as the GRU, used the models to research "various satellite and radar technologies that may pertain to conventional military operations in Ukraine", Microsoft said.

Microsoft said North Korean hackers used the models to generate content "that would likely be for use in spear-phishing campaigns" against regional experts.

Iranian hackers also leaned on the models to write more convincing emails, Microsoft said, at one point using them to draft a message attempting to lure "prominent feminists" to a

booby-trapped website.

The software giant said Chinese state-backed hackers were also experimenting with large language models, for example, to ask questions about rival intelligence agencies, cybersecurity issues and

"notable individuals".

Neither Burt nor Rotsted would be drawn on the volume of activity or how many accounts had been suspended. And Burt defended the zero-tolerance ban on hacking groups — which doesn't

extend to Microsoft offerings such as its search engine Bing — by pointing to the novelty of AI and the concern over its deployment.

"This technology is both new and incredibly powerful," he said.





Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi addresses the crowd on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution

Iran's revolution continues to expand after 45 years

ARAB NEWS

Regardless of the lenses through which people worldwide choose to view Iran's revolution on its 45th anniversary, the majority tend to see that the regime that came to power in 1979, brandishing an anti-Western and anti-status quo sectarian agenda, especially in the Arab world, has matured. And that maturity is paying dividends for the regime in Tehran both regionally and internationally, despite a mixed and complex landscape of disapproval at the domestic level.

Four and a half decades since the inception of the Islamic Republic, those who ousted the pro-American shah could never have dreamed they would have the ability to survive and later expand their theocratic revolution, presenting themselves as a difficult player to circumvent in world power calculations. Decades-long efforts to tailor a security and stability apparatus in the key region of the Middle East — like finding a settlement to the 75-year-old Palestinian-Israeli conflict, securing the Gulf region's oil supplies to the world and lately the adversities impacting Red Sea shipping lanes — offer a clear indication of how Iran, by design or luck or both, has the capability to frustrate, spoil and disrupt the regional order and beyond. These low-maintenance and cost-effective actions have yielded high returns for Tehran.

Iran has, through decades of championing the slogans of "death to America" and "death to Israel," managed to conceive and nurture proxy groups in several Arab countries. These nonstate militias have become the "tentacles" of Tehran's exported Shiite teaching-fueled ideological revolution.

Late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini launched this project late in the 1970s with the aim of Iran becoming, through these groupings, a spoiler that is capable of projecting its power far beyond its borders. It can today even influence the global balance of power between the key players: the US and wider West on the one side and Russia, China and an increasing number of ascending states from the Global South on the other.

In the celebrations held in Tehran on Sunday to mark the occasion, one could not fail to see an emboldened Iran through what was said by President Ebrahim Raisi, who called for Israel to be ejected from the UN. The show of strength was very apparent during an exhibition in Azadi (Freedom) Square, which showed off Iranian military hardware like its Shahed drones, Qiam ballistic missiles and Simorgh satellite launchers, some of which have been active in theaters of conflict such as Ukraine, Gaza, Iraq, Syria, south Lebanon and the Red Sea.

Since the Islamic Republic's inception, Iran has lived under various sanctions regimes and has managed not only to survive, but also to turn the tables against its numerous detractors and develop a nuclear program. It claimed this was for peaceful purposes, but fooled no one. This is in addition to an increasingly successful weapons development project that has provided advanced weapons and technical know-how to its proxies.

Above all, Iran has managed to ideologically weaponize sections of the Shiite community worldwide and make it a spearhead for advancing Iranian interests and goals. It is through this community that

Iran can claim to have succeeded in exporting its revolution, as its leadership repeatedly boasts about Tehran's control of four Arab capitals, namely Beirut, Baghdad, Damascus and Sana'a. This has been rendered even clearer since the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel and the subsequent war of reprisals launched by Tel Aviv, with fires being lit by pro-Iranian proxies in various parts of the region under the pretense of supporting Hamas.

Tehran has, in recent weeks, demonstrated more boldness and ability — through its control of the so-called Axis of Resistance and its ability to mobilize on various fronts simultaneously — to put pressure on the forces that are bent on working to maintain law and order, at least for the continued flow of trade and commodities across the world. All that while positioning itself directly or indirectly to work to undermine the US and Western influence and demonstrate the limits and even the erosion of US power in the Red Sea region.

After 45 years, one must ask if Iranian interests are actually served by the ideological, religious drive of its leadership on the domestic, regional and international levels. Many believe that Iran has long been guided by a determination to protect its regime and prevent domestic or foreign forces from overthrowing it. And that has been achieved despite the precarious domestic situation in Iran, as seen with the recurring demonstrations, uprisings and crackdowns. The last of these began in September 2022, when the Woman, Life, Freedom movement exploded. The regime is still adjusting to these protests, with a zero tolerance posture being adopted against all forms of associa-

tion, activism and even small gatherings.

Meanwhile, the semblance of Iran's elections being free and fair have been undermined in recent years. The regime is facing more trouble in ensuring wider participation, while its grip on manufacturing the candidate lists through its stringent vetting system recently saw ex-President Hassan Rouhani deemed unfit to run in the forthcoming Assembly of Experts elections.

In all my years as a journalist and after a number of visits to Iran, I have often tired of answering the question of what Iran's interests are if seen through the prisms of its behavior, policies and alliances. For the last 45 years, Iran has never veered from the foundations that were set for the regime, primarily to deploy its religious doctrine as a tool to manage society and to use its many revolutionary arms to export the revolution and change the nature and compass of the countries in the region. All that while using its championing of the cause of liberating Palestine and defeating Israel as a rallying tool to win the support of the masses across the Muslim world.

Years of investment and resolve have clearly paid dividends for the regime in Tehran. But did Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his disciples in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the expeditionary Quds Force mature enough to stop lighting fires or to help extinguish them to make way for stability and prosperity? It is unlikely that even another 45 years would teach the revolutionaries to vie for peace and prosperity. After all, a leopard never changes its spots.

GCC is a world leader in AI usage — but that comes with risks

ARAB NEWS

Generative AI was one of the hottest topics at the World Governments Summit in Dubai this week. And it is no wonder: The launch of ChatGPT in November 2022 sparked a frenzy of interest in generative AI around the world that has only grown stronger since.

But few regions have shown more excitement for the technology than the Gulf Cooperation Council area. In the UAE and Saudi Arabia, for example, 74 percent and 68 percent of workers respectively said they use generative AI in some capacity at least once a week.

That is according to a 19-nation survey of more than 25,000 employees conducted in November by my firm's think tank, the Oliver Wyman Forum. Only India was higher, at 83 percent. The global average, meanwhile, was already high at 55 percent.

This strong showing for the

lar communications about how the technology will change the world of work.

Companies could follow the proactive example of one global tech company, which recently decided not to fill positions that generative AI is likely to eliminate in the next five years.

Firms should also consider ways to retrain existing workers at risk of AI displacement. One major retailer, for example, recently launched an AI bot that can handle run-of-the-mill customer questions, so it retrained call center workers to become interior design advisers.

Foreseeing and responding to such challenges clearly has a vital role to play in policy-making, as does defining clear goals and objectives. As such, governments across the region have been planning for this transformation for years.

Qatar's National AI Strategy includes pillars on talent



GCC region has been years in the making. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have all been leaders in establishing national AI strategies, which were in place long before the arrival of ChatGPT.

Countries in the region are also investing heavily in generative AI foundational models.

But while the GCC is a world leader in generative AI adoption, regional companies are not always keeping up in training employees to use the tools safely.

In the UAE and Saudi Arabia, 61 percent and 57 percent of workers respectively said the training their companies provide was insufficient, according to the survey data. In Qatar the figure is 62 percent, tied with Mexico for third place in the world behind China and Singapore.

The combination of intense interest in generative AI among workers and sometimes insufficient company guardrails poses potential risks for GCC business leaders, from data loss and misinformation to talent retention.

Most urgently, companies need to provide clear guidelines and high-quality training to protect sensitive data. Some 92 percent of UAE workers, for example, said they have exposed company data by using generative AI tools at some point.

These capabilities, like analyzing a dataset, summarizing internal reports or transcribing meeting notes, promise massive returns in productivity. But they also bring data risks that business leaders must manage both quickly and aggressively.

And then there is the issue of talent. Despite GCC workers' intense interest in generative AI and its potential to enhance productivity, they are also among the most anxious about its consequences.

Some 82 percent of UAE workers, for example, said they are concerned that generative AI will make their jobs redundant — greater than the global average of 60 percent.

Employers also need to be transparent about how generative AI will impact hiring and capacity to discourage workers from fleeing unnecessarily.

They can address the issue by providing clear and regu-

attraction strategies and the changing landscape of employment. The UAE's strategy, launched in 2017, has eight key objectives, including those on strong governance, developing a fertile ecosystem and enabling world-class research.

In Saudi Arabia, the National Strategy for Data and AI has set clear objectives, including attracting \$20 billion in investments in data and AI, enriching data and AI entrepreneurship to create 300 startups, and empowering institutions so that the country ranks among the top 20 in terms of scientific contribution. All of these goals are earmarked for 2030.

Used wisely, AI can be a powerful tool to enable the global workforce to get more done. But to unlock its full potential, business leaders must provide the upskilling, clear protocols and transparency necessary to ensure those workers are reassured, educated effectively and well-prepared for the future.

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International recognition of Palestine can kickstart peace process

ARAB NEWS

UK Foreign Minister David Cameron last month announced that his country was considering recognizing a Palestinian state. The US State Department has put out a similar message. This is being touted as Israel faces an ongoing genocide case in front of the International Court of Justice.

Israel is supposed to present a report to the court by Feb. 23 showing the measures it has taken to prevent genocide in Gaza. Any observer can see that the killing of innocent civilians has not stopped; in fact, it has only accelerated. The International Court of Justice will take the issue to the UN Security Council. But any resolution that is not in favor of Israel will likely be vetoed by the US. What could happen next is a vote in the UN General Assembly on giving Palestine full membership. This would be the right course of action.

Israel has been dragging out this issue since the time of Oslo, when it got from the Palestinians a recognition of Israel but it never recognized a state of Palestine in return. All the Palestinians got was Israeli recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The Israelis kept finding reasons to avoid having to recognize a state. They claimed that the Palestinians should recognize Israel as a Jewish state. However, when Egypt and Jordan established diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv and recognized the state of Israel, they were not asked to do the same. Why are the Palestinians only offered this specific type of

recognition and what does it mean?

Israel has used all means possible to avoid talking about a Palestinian state. It first used divide and conquer, so it propped up Hamas to have the excuse that Palestinians are not united and it cannot have a discussion with a party that is committed to the destruction of the state of Israel. The other excuse Israelis give is that the Palestinian Authority is inept and hence Palestinians are unable to govern themselves.

Anyone who observes the Palestinian issue closely can easily conclude that Israelis do not want a Palestinian state.

Now, they are finally spelling it out. In December, the Israeli ambassador to the UK said it bluntly during a TV interview. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu bragged to Likud party lawmakers that he was the "only one" who could prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. Of course, the Likud is committed to settlements, which means it is opposed to the concept of a Palestinian state on what it considers to be the land of Israel.

Recently, Israeli officials have found another way to push back against the idea of a Palestinian state. They say it

would be "rewarding terrorism." This way, the "terrorists" would have achieved their goal. However, Israelis have resorted to terrorism throughout their history. Menachem Begin killed innocent people and so did Yitzhak Shamir, but Israel was still founded. In fact, both Begin and Shamir went on to become prime minister.

The international community today recognizes that the occupation is no longer sustainable. Regional stability requires a Palestinian state. However, the world should also recognize that, if the issue is left to the Israelis, it will nev-

er happen. A Palestinian state with well-defined borders should be imposed on Israel. This would push Tel Aviv to discuss the other details, such as the shape of the state, the settlements, the issue of refugees' right of return, the security arrangements, etc. However, without a solid starting point, which is the recognition of a Palestinian state along the borders of 1967, the negotiations will be as futile as they have been in the 30 years since the Oslo Accords.

The mistake that the Arab world committed in 2002 was that it offered an initiative to Israel but did not push for it.

The Arab Peace Initiative offers Israel unanimous recognition and normalization in return for a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Israelis did not even accept discussing it.

To be fair, even if today Israel had a prime minister who believed in the two-state solution, it is very unlikely he would be able to deliver on that. The reason is that the settler movement would be able to block it. Today, the mood in Israel is not in favor of giving the Palestinians a state. The thinking is that the Gazans were under blockade for 17 years and yet were still able to carry out the Oct. 7 attacks. What would happen if they had a state of their own and were positioned strategically on the hills overlooking Tel Aviv? So, a Palestinian state should be imposed on Israel.

This is the time for the Arab world to rectify the mistake it made in 2002. Today, Arab countries should push and use all the leverage they have with the US to pressure it into recognizing the state of Palestine. This would facilitate an international recognition of Palestine. Once a Palestinian state is a fait accompli, the Israelis will have no choice but to seal a deal.

A Palestinian state not only involves the fate of the Palestinians, but also the stability of the region. Palestine has long been a central cause for the Arab and Muslim worlds. It has also been a cause that all radical movements across the region have used to gain legitimacy. It is now time to pressure Israel into peace and the first step toward achieving that is through international recognition of the state of Palestine.



A Palestinian state will not only involve the fate of the Palestinians, but also the stability of the region

Ahead of the European Parliament elections, the center ground is growing ever-smaller

ARAB NEWS

Normally, few people in Europe care much about European Parliament elections — other than the members of the parliament, of course, whose political lives and livelihoods are often on the line.

This year, however, all eyes are on the elections, which are still four months away but already making news.

Between June 6 and 9, more than 400 million voters in the 27 member countries of the EU will be able to choose 720 MEPs to represent them for the next five years. Voter interest in these elections has been in decline since the first poll in 1979, with turnout falling from almost 62 percent to just 42 percent in 2014, before rising back above 50 percent in 2019, when 50.62 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots.

This year, there are several reasons why the European Parliament elections are attracting greater attention across the continent. Firstly, most political parties are taking them very seriously, as they coincide with, or are likely to set the scene and narratives for, almost a dozen national parliamentary, legislative or presidential elections scheduled for this year and next.

An equally strong reason for the unusually keen interest in the elections is the unprecedented corruption scandal that emerged in the Parliament in December 2022, when a vice president and several other officials, including at least three other MEPs, were accused of taking bribes from Qatar in exchange for championing the nation's agenda in Europe.

The scandal resulted in the arrest of key individuals named in the allegations and the matter is still under investigation. But it also revealed the extent to which MEPs might have been indulging in illegal, or at the very least immoral, behavior. A recent study, for example, found that at least one in four MEPs were involved in corruption cases or

facing some other type of legal action or scandal.

All of this has come in very handy for those parties and politicians, mainly on the far right of the political spectrum, that have long been opposed to the European Parliament, and even the wider EU. They accuse Brussels of being an opaque, hugely overpaid bureaucracy that is completely disconnected from the realities on the streets of member nations, and which controls hundreds of trillions of euros in funds that are used not for the greater good of the people, but for their own whims and fancies.

They also accuse, with some justification, Brussels, and most notably the European Commission, of developing millions of rules and regulations, many of them extraordinarily complex and intrusive, that have resulted in European

industries and economies becoming highly uncompetitive.

Little wonder, then, that recent polls suggest far-right and populist parties are set to make sizable gains in the European elections, while centrist parties, both center-left and center-right, are likely to lose votes. This is a trend we saw even during the previous election in 2019.

In the view of these far-right and populist parties, it is not only the corruption scandals that are indicative of all that is wrong with the EU and its administrative body, the European Commission. They have long been critical of its stance on several political and policy decisions including, notably, immigration and the rules governing agriculture, sustainability and ecology.

With inflation and the cost of living still rising sharply in

several European nations, far-right politicians have found other sticks with which to beat the centrists, as well as leftists. They accuse bureaucrats in Brussels of adopting policies such as the Green Deal that have made life more expensive for Europeans, pushing up the prices of fuel, food and most other necessities of life.

For the past several weeks, thousands of farmers from across Europe, most notably Germany, France, Poland, Spain and even Belgium, have been out on the streets protesting against new environmental policies the EU has adopted which, they say, are making farming economically unviable, thereby putting their livelihoods in danger.

The farmers say that they were already being crushed by the might of large food and retail companies that have driven down the prices they

pay for produce to the extent that farmers are losing money on their crops. Meanwhile, they add, those same businesses are profiteering in shops through huge mark-ups on produce they buy for peanuts from farmers.

Far-right parties have seized upon these protests as an example of the ways in which Brussels is crushing the ordinary European citizen, in a similar way to how former US president and current presidential candidate Donald Trump talks about normal American citizens getting left behind.

Many on the far right are also using the war between Russia and Ukraine as another example of bad EU policies. They say that even as European farmers face an existential threat as a result of rising costs and dwindling revenues, Brussels is encourag-

ing imports of food and other products from Ukraine.

These accusations have struck a chord among some voters and are one of the main reasons far-right parties are tipped to be the biggest gainers come the elections in June. Most opinion polls predict a major shift to the far right in many countries at the elections, with populist, radical-right parties gaining votes and seats across the EU, and center-right, center-left and green parties losing them.

The polls also suggest anti-European parties currently lead the vote share in at least nine nations, most notably France, Italy and Poland, and are in second or third place in another nine, notably Germany and Spain.

As a result, almost 50 percent of the MEPs who will be elected in June might be outside of the super grand coalition of the three centrist groups.

The elections might also result in the first downturn in votes for green parties in Europe, which have been on the ascendance for more than two decades. The word on the street is that many Europeans are unwilling to pay the price required to go green in their daily lives, and so the Green Deal adopted by the EU is falling prey to populist propaganda.

This shift toward the hard-right, if it plays out in the upcoming European and national elections, is bound to put huge pressure on the EU, and in particular its sustainability agenda, which the right-wingers might try to unravel or push back from its goals. Even now, the EU is struggling to ensure it will meet its commitments on climate change.

All of this also means that the heightened interest in the outcome of the European Parliament elections is not limited to Europe; they will be closely watched by thousands of ecology and sustainability activists as well.



Between June 6 and 9, more than 400 million voters from the member countries of the EU will be able to choose 720 MEPs

THURSDAY

15 FEBRUARY 2024

Osaka beats Garcia in Doha to avenge Australian Open loss

DOHA: Naomi Osaka put last week's first round defeat in Abu Dhabi behind her with a straight sets defeat of 15th seed Caroline Garcia here at the Qatar Open on Monday.

This was former world number one Osaka's second win from the five matches she has played since returning last month after a 15-month time out on maternity leave from the tour. The Japanese four-time Grand Slam winner was exacting a small measure of revenge on Garcia with this 7-5, 6-4 success in Doha as it was the French star Garcia who knocked her out in the first round of last month's Australian Open.

And she reckons she is beginning to find her stride again after becoming a mum. "I feel like I'm a much better player now. In Australia, my returns weren't as good and I don't feel like I was as focused as I am now," said the match winner.

On coming back physically after pregnancy she added: "It's been a really tough journey. I felt like I was chasing myself in the past and it honestly wasn't really healthy to do.

"After giving birth, I feel I trained really quickly, I'm a very big perfectionist and it's tough when you don't see results as quickly.

"I felt like I was driving a car that wasn't mine. So my body didn't feel like the body

that I was used to.

"It was in that journey I felt like I learned how to love myself as I am now. I got to wake up every day and see my daughter and know that I was strong enough for her to come into this world."

Osaka's next assignment on her comeback trail is a second round date with Petra Martic of Croatia.

This is the second time the pair have crossed swords but it comes a decade after their first encounter.

A 16-year-old Osaka prevailed on that occasion, a final qualifying round match at Stanford in 2014.

The omens did not look great for Osaka on Monday as Garcia won her first 11 service points but she knuckled down and finally broke her opponent when she was serving for the set to level at 5-5.

She then fended off two break points before wrapping up the set with a love break.

A further break of serve in the last game of the match earned her the pick-me-up win she needed after her early knockout a week ago. Two-time defending champion Iga Swiatek began her quest for a third straight title in emphatic fashion with a 6-1, 6-1 second round win over Romania's Sorana Cirstea.

Also through was sixth seed Marketa Vondrousova after her 6-2, 0-6, 6-4 defeat of Belgian Greet Minnen.

Tennis fraternity in mourning as Zainab, 18, passes away

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's tennis fraternity was in mourning on Tuesday after budding youngster Zainab Ali Naqvi, who was competing in the ongoing ITF Junior Tennis Championship, passed away because of suspected heart failure at the age of just 18.

Zainab, who had arrived in Islamabad from Karachi to participate in the ITF event, passed away on Monday night and matches slated for Tuesday were postponed as a mark of respect in her memory and will now be played on Wednesday according to the same schedule.

According to officials of the Pakistan Tennis Federation, Zainab had taken part in a practice session on Monday evening before going to a guest house in sector F-6, where she was staying with her grandmother.

"After reaching the guest house, Zainab had gone to take a shower but didn't return after a long time had passed. Her grandmother caller her but to no avail," added the official.

He informed that the staff of the guest house then broke down the door to find her unconscious body, which was shifted to Kulsum International Hospital where doctors pronounced her dead on arrival.

"Zainab's body was then shifted to the PolyClinic for autopsy before it was flown to Karachi. The real cause of death will be determined in the autopsy report but it apparently seems that it was a heart failure due to showering immediately after a hectic practice session."

PTF announced Zainab's demise in a news release earlier on Tuesday.



Japan's Naomi Osaka in action in the round of 32 match against Croatia's Petra Martic during their Women's Singles tennis match at the Qatar WTA Open at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha.

PSL 9 Anthem featuring Ali Zafar, Aima Baig released

The Pakistan Super League (PSL) season 9 anthem featuring prominent singers Ali Zafar and Aima Bang has been released.

The anthem named "Khul k Khel" was written, composed and produced by Ali Zafar. The video of the song included snippets of all six teams and short clips of some of the moments from the previous edition.

"Ready for the ultimate banger of the season? Time for the HBL PSL Anthem Reveal! For a nation that's all heart, for people who live laugh and love boldly, this HBL PSL we invite you to sing along and let your hair down. Khul ke enjoy, Khul ke cheer and most importantly #KhulKeKhel pyaray!!" the description of the video read.

Lahore Police's PSL 9 security strategy revealed

Police have formulated a security plan for the upcoming ninth edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL 9), which is set to commence on February 17. More than 7,000 police personnel will perform duties during the PSL matches to be played at the Gaddafi Stadium Lahore. The security officials include 13 SPs, 36 DSPs and 81 SHOs while women police officials would also be deployed for the security. Furthermore, 27 teams of Elite Force, 60 Dolphin Squad and 52 teams of the Police Response Unit will take part in patrolling activities during the matches.

DICC T20 World Cup UAE 2024 set to showcase deaf cricket excellence

Deaf International Cricket Council (DICC) CEO Muhammad Zahir Uddin Babar from Pakistan on Monday said that the DICC T20 World Cup UAE 2024 would roll into action from March 4 to 12 at the Vision Cricket Center in Sharjah.

In this grand deaf cricket activity, top teams including Australia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, South Africa and defending champions Sri Lanka will showcase their talent in a battle to gain excellence, he said. Zahir congratulated Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab, Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, on his recent election as the 37th Chairman of Pakistan Cricket Board, and also thanked all other cricket boards for their continued support for their respective national deaf cricket teams.

He highlighted the rich history of deaf cricket, dat-

ing back to the first ever match played between South Australia and Victoria in Australia in 1895 that was played in Adelaide and the Victoria teams traveled overnight by train.

In a heartfelt appeal, the DICC CEO called upon private sponsors to come forward and support these differently-abled sportspeople, who serve as inspirational figures within the global deaf cricket community. He also shed light on the challenges faced by DICC in securing support from the International Cricket Council (ICC) for their global events, stressing the importance of equal opportunities for disabled athletes on the world stage.

Zahir said it's disheartening to witness the lack of support from the ICC for the deaf cricket community worldwide. Deaf play-

ers, with their inherent talent and equal rights, deserve the recognition and financial assistance that other cricketers receive. DICC, stepping up to provide a global platform for these players, highlights the unfair treatment they face. It's crucial for the ICC to stand alongside DICC and extend the necessary financial support, allowing these remarkable deaf players to exhibit their skills on the international stage.

Emphasizing the self-financing efforts of DICC in promoting deaf cricket worldwide, Zahir urged the ICC to extend their support and recognition to disability cricket, stressing that these athletes are an integral part of the cricketing community. He expressed gratitude towards Sports Spice Dubai and Vision Cricket Centre Sharjah for their support in organizing

the DICC T20 World Cup UAE 2024.

Zahir, the DICC CEO, commended the dedication of DICC members, including Chairman Stefan Pichowshi, Secretary Michael Lombard, Treasurer Sumit Jain and others for their tireless efforts in making the upcoming tournament a reality. He invited private companies, departments and the ICC to join hands in championing the cause of deaf cricket, providing them with equal opportunities and recognition on a global platform.

The DICC T20 World Cup UAE 2024 promises to highlight the incredible talent and spirit of deaf cricket players from around the world. Zahir extended a warm invitation to the public to witness the thrilling cricket action and support these deserving cricket heroes.



The HBL PSL 9 Lahore Leg has brought suffering and misery to Lahore. The provincial capital was hit by the worst traffic jam even before the teams arrived in the provincial capital for the second round of Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine.

Kuldeep says fit-again Jadeja available for third England Test

RAJKOT: India's Ravindra Jadeja is making steady progress in training after a

hamstring injury and the experienced all-rounder would be available for this

week's third Test against England in Rajkot, spinner Kuldeep Yadav said on

Tuesday.

The 35-year-old Jadeja sustained the problem on the fourth day of the first Test in Hyderabad which England won and missed the second of the five-match series in Visakhapatnam where the hosts drew level at 1-1 last week.

Jadeja had been recalled to the Indian squad with selectors keeping an eye on his fitness before the third Test which begins on Thursday.

"He's doing his routine. He did one session yesterday as well. I think he's available," Kuldeep told reporters.

Jadeja's return could mean Kuldeep or Axar Patel

make way, although there is a chance the trio could all feature as batsman KL Rahul is ruled out with a right quadriceps issue.

"I'm not sure about my position because there's still two days to go for the match," Kuldeep added. "If I get the opportunity I'll be more than happy. I don't think too much about whether I'm playing or not. I just enjoy my day and keep working hard."

"That's my process. The combination matters a lot in a team game. It's as simple as that."

India will be without Virat Kohli for the rest of the series due to personal reasons while England are

missing spin spearhead Jack Leach who sustained a knee injury.

The tourists are confident that Rehan Ahmed's visa issues will be sorted out before the match after the young spinner ran into problems following the team's return to India from a mid-series break in Abu Dhabi.

The leg-spinner was briefly stopped at Rajkot airport due to a "paperwork discrepancy." Reports in the Indian media said the 19-year-old, who is of Pakistani heritage, had a single-entry visa but the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Tuesday the player obtained a temporary visa

and the correct one would be issued soon.

"We were advised, on returning to India, that there was paperwork discrepancy with Rehan Ahmed's visa," a spokesperson for the ECB said. "The local authorities at Rajkot Airport were supportive, enabling Rehan entry on a temporary visa."

"The correct visa should be processed and issued in the coming days. He will continue to prepare with the rest of the squad ahead of the third Test." Ahmed's fellow spinner Shoaib Bashir, who is of Pakistani heritage, was ruled out of the first Test in Hyderabad due to a visa delay that was eventually resolved.



USC announces Rs 7.49 billion Ramzan package

By MIAN MUNIR

Islamabad : Feb 14 : The Utility Store Corporation (USC) has announced a Rs 7.49 billion Ramzan package for 2024. USC will provide 19 items at subsidized

rates as a part of its Ramzan package. According to spokesman, USC will provide ghee, wheat flour, sugar, cooking oil, rice, lentils, dates, basin, milk, drinks and spices at subsidized rates

during holy month of Ramzan. BISP members will get basic items at subsidized rates from USC. Other than BISP members, general buyers will also get relief on enlisted items during holy month of Ramzan.

Chinese model a lesson for Pakistan to tackle rapid urbanisation

Pakistan is experiencing a rapid urbanization trend, with its urban population swelling at an unprecedented rate. As cities expand and the demand for efficient transportation systems intensifies, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive overhaul of transportation planning.

Talking to WealthPK, Mian Rajan Sultan Peerzada,

and environmental damage, making the current urban transport system unsustainable. To address these challenges, a shift towards more sustainable transportation methods is imperative," he stressed.

In the quest for sustainable solutions, Peerzada emphasized the importance of public transportation systems that integrate various modes

develop innovative solutions to address congestion, enhance connectivity, and create a sustainable transportation ecosystem," he opined.

An official of the Transport Planning Unit (TPU), Punjab, confided to WealthPK that their mission was to establish a prosperous and well-connected society by developing and implementing safe, fair, and sustainable transportation systems.

"Our completed projects include the Sheikhpura Urban Transport Master Plan, Identification of Urban and Sub-urban Bus Routes for Bahawalpur city, Improvement of Urban Transport in Gujranwala city, Indication and Ear-marking of Zones for D-class Stands in Khanewal city, Punjab Transport Infrastructure Management System (PTIMS), Traffic Management Plan for Sahiwal city, Traffic Management Plan for Jhelum city, GIS Based Parking Management & Information System (PMIS) for Lahore Parking Company, he said.

A Chinese company recently delivered 160 high-end pure electric buses to Pakistan as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative. This batch of pure electric buses exported this time has the advantages of zero emissions, low operating costs, and low noise pollution, which will greatly improve the efficiency of public transportation operations and the quality of residents' travel.

such as walking, biking, and buses. Drawing parallels with successful models, he suggested that Pakistan, as a country with limited resources, should not rely solely on the private vehicle-dominated transport systems.

China's rapid urbanization over the past few decades has been accompanied by a paradigm shift in transportation planning. The country has successfully implemented extensive public transportation networks, high-speed rail systems, and advanced traffic management technologies.

"By drawing inspiration from China's successful experience in managing urban mobility, Pakistan can

President of the Association for Development of Local Governance (ADLG), said, "As Pakistan faces the unprecedented challenge of rapid urbanization, transportation planning becomes critical to ensuring sustainable and efficient urban development. The majority of the urban population is concentrated in eight cities, including Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Hyderabad, Gujranwala, and Peshawar."

According to Peerzada, the existing road system lacks the structural capacity to handle increasing vehicles, leading to chronic traffic congestion.

"Greater reliance on fossil fuels exacerbates air pollu-



HYDERABAD: A worker woman paints clay-made pitcher at her work place near Jamshoro Road.

Wapda to divert River Swat at Mohmand Dam Project in April

ISLAMABAD - WAPDA is poised to divert River Swat in April this year at the under-construction Mohmand Dam, as diversion system of the project is steadily heading towards completion in accordance with the time-lines. Chairman WAPDA Engr Lt Gen (r) Sajjad Ghani visited Mohmand district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. He visited in detail construction sites of the spillway, the diversion tunnels and the powerhouse to review construction activities going on there. Advisor (Projects) WAPDA, GM and PD Mohmand Dam Project and the consultants and the contractors were also present during the visit. Later, the chairman also presided over a progress review meeting at the project office. At present, construction work is continuing on 12 sites. The project team made a de-tailed briefing about diversion scheme, concreting and slope stabilisation at the spillway, slope excavation and support works at the powerhouse, excavation at the irrigation tunnels, construction of structures across the irrigation canals and finishing works at the permanent access roads located on both right and left banks of the river. The chairman was briefed that the offices and the employees have been permanently shifted to the newly constructed facilities in the project area. A few completed buildings will also be taken over and the remaining staff will be shifted there accordingly.

Emphasising upon the need for timely completion of Mohmand Dam, the chairman urged the contractors to expedite the activities relating to quarry development for the dam. He directed deployment of additional resources for the purpose. Mohmand Dam is a multipurpose project, which will store water for agriculture, control floods, supply water.

Careem says its social campaign that infuriated PML-N was 'not linked to political scenario'

Ride-hailing service Careem on Wednesday clarified that an online post made through its social media account that caught flak from the PML-N was "not linked in any way to the political scenario of the country".

Earlier today, a screenshot of a post by the company on social media platform X began doing the rounds online.

The now-deleted post said: "Program war gaya?" which literally translates into "program gone bust?".

The catchphrase entered the political lexicon when PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat used it to describe what became of a show of Express News programme 'Kal Tak' with Javed Chaudhry in September when Marwat had a brawl with PML-N Senator Afnan Ullah Khan.

On Sept 28, in an off-the-cuff remark made to an Urdu Point journalist on the programme's status post-fight, Marwat had uttered the now infamous

catchphrase.

More recently, the catchphrase had been used by PTI supporters during the elections to refer to their party's success over its rivals in the recently held general elections despite a severe state clampdown and other hurdles.

The post also came a day after the PML-N, along with other political parties, announced its bid for a coalition to form the next government. Notably missing from the proceedings was party supremo Nawaz Sharif while shortly after, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif was nominated as the prime minister's slot.

Nawaz was previously widely tipped as the party's prime ministerial candidate for what would have been a possible 4th stint.

Careem's use of the catchphrase in the now-deleted post prompted a backlash from the PML-N, which accused Careem of "pushing political agendas".

"This isn't the first time they (Careem) have done this," said the party on X. "Careem Pakistan showing its true colours again. More interested in pushing political agendas. Shameful."

PML-N Punjab President Rana Sanaullah termed the purported post as a "useless marketing tactics to be relevant" and called on people to use alternate ride-hailing services instead.

Some social media users even resorted to doxxing Careem employees and their details.

Clarifying the controversy in a statement issued to Dawn.com, the company said: "The post that is subject to discussion on social media is not linked in any way to the political scenario of the country. This post was purely to advertise the 'later booking' product available on our application. "We would like to reiterate that Careem does not carry a political stance towards any political parties."

ICCI to collaborate with IPO to create awareness about IPRs

ISLAMABAD - The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) will collaborate with the Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan (IPO) to create awareness among the business community about the importance of intellectual property rights (IPRs) for better growth of their businesses.

Chairman, Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan (IPO-Pakistan) Farukh Amil on Tuesday visited the ICCI and discussed the matter of sensitizing the business community about the importance of intellectual property rights for businesses to avoid counterfeiting and piracy of their

products and achieve better growth, said a news release. Farukh Amil briefed the business community about the role of IPO-Pakistan in promoting an enabling IP environment to promote businesses, creativity, and innovation, said a news release.

The lack of an IP culture and weak IP enforcement are major challenges and IPO-Pakistan is working for awareness and enforcement of IPRs to place Pakistan on the global IP map as a compliant and responsible country, he added. He said adherence to IPRs will enhance Pakistan's reputation as a business and investment-friendly country adding

that SMEs should benefit from the services of IPO-Pakistan for better protection of their patents, copyrights, and trademarks.

Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Acting President ICCI said that SMEs are the backbone of the economy and IPO-Pakistan should further simplify the IP registration processes and procedures and introduce mobile apps to facilitate SMEs in the online registration of their products and services for copyrights and trademarks. He said that in the global competitive business environment, the role of IPO-Pakistan is important in promoting innovations and startups through strict enforcement of IPRs.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor arranging and displaying strawberry to attract the customers at Fruit & Vegetable Market in Federal Capital.

First plenary meeting for cotton crop today

ISLAMABAD/MULTAN - The first plenary meeting for the cotton crop will be held on February 14 (Wednesday) to discuss and deliberate the ways and means to enhance the output of the crop during the coming season to achieve sustainable agriculture growth and economic development in the country.

The meeting will evaluate the per-maund cotton price during the forthcoming season to ensure a proper rate of return to local growers, besides

encouraging the farming community to bring maximum area under cotton cultivation, said Cotton Commissioner in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research Anjum Shahzad. Talking to APP here on Tuesday, he said that the meeting will also make deliberations to overcome the challenges faced by the cotton growers and suggest innovative measures and best crop management practices to enhance the per-acre output of cotton during the next season.

He said that due to the measures introduced by the government during last season, the cotton output gained momentum and recorded over 8.354 million bales, adding that efforts will be made to further boost the crop production during the coming season to strengthen the government's efforts to develop the agriculture sector in the country. He said that the uptick in the cotton sector would help to promote industrial growth and economic development in the country,

adding that the government was taking steps to ensure an adequate supply of all inputs during the crop season to achieve maximum output.

Meanwhile, agriculture experts have advised farmers to complete sowing of early cotton triple gene varieties from mid-February to March end to maximize gains. In a statement issued here Tuesday, an agriculture spokesman citing experts' opinion, said that farmers from Sargodha, Multan, Faisalabad, and Sahiwal districts should



sow registered seed varieties approved by the Punjab government including triple gene cotton varieties from Feb 15 to Mar 31, 2024. He said that triple gene varieties including CKC-1, CKC-3, CKC-5, CKC-6, Ghauri-2, and ICI-386 would prove to be productive and profitable in case of sowing from Feb 15 to Mar 31, 2024. Moreover, he added that early sowing would also lessen the chances of pest attack on the crop and would reduce crop management expenses, the release concluded.

FTO decides Rs 17,742.16 million refund claims in 2023

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): The Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) has addressed the grievances of the taxpayers by processing 8,963 cases with an implementation status of 94.07% during 2023 as compared to 73.29% last year.

Likewise, requests for refund claims were also decided to the tune of Rs. 17,742.16 million in 2023 and the due amount was paid to the aggrieved taxpayers by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

This was highlighted by the Federal Tax Ombudsman Asif Mahmood Jah, who called on President Dr Arif Alvi and presented FTO's Annual Report 2023 at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Wednesday.

The Federal Tax Ombudsman briefed the president about FTO's overall performance and its key initiatives to facilitate taxpayers and expeditiously address their grievances against maladministration of tax officials.

He stated that concerted efforts were undertaken to

enhance FTO's outreach by launching awareness campaigns and opening up regional offices in the country.

He informed that Honorary Advisors had also been appointed abroad to facilitate overseas Pakistanis in the USA, Canada, Sweden, UAE, Hong Kong and the Philippines.

He added that FTO had appointed leading businessmen as Honorary Advisors from various Chambers of Commerce and Industries to facilitate the business community. "To ensure prompt response against the maladministration of tax authorities, a mobile App has been developed enabling aggrieved complainants to lodge complaints and check their status using mobile/smart devices", he stated.

He apprised that highly informative training sessions had also been conducted to enhance the professional skills and expertise of Ombudsman institutions in the country.

While appreciating the

performance of FTO, the president said that FTO had done an excellent job by processing a record number of cases and providing refunds worth Rs Rs17,742.16 million to taxpayers.

He remarked that the institution of FTO needed to be further strengthened as it was providing free-of-cost and prompt justice to aggrieved taxpayers. He called for using the latest technology for seamless service delivery and timely disposal of taxpayers' complaints to improve the country's tax regime. He said that FTO had effectively contributed to promoting good governance in the country.

It is worth stating that the FTO is a quasi-judicial forum, mandated to diagnose, investigate, redress and rectify any injustice or maladministration done to a person by the functionaries administering federal tax laws. It aims at enhancing the overall satisfaction of the taxpayers and strengthening their trust in the system. NNI



ISLAMABAD: Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO), Mr Asif Mahmood Jah, presenting FTO's Annual Report 2023 to President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

PDM-II drama will also fail like serial one: Babar Awan

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Babar Awan said that the PDM-II drama will also fail like the serial one.

Talking to the media outside the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday, he said that the people are conscious and now there is no future of the mafias in the country.

"The video statements and oaths of the PTI-backed winner candidates are with us. If someone distances himself from the PTI, we have enough content to remove him," he added.

He said that they would not withdraw from their rights. "The world has rejected the elections. No government will continue if the PTI was not allowed to form the government in the Centre and Punjab," he maintained.

PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat said that they were being intimidated by the May 9 incidents. "We will not sit with the mafia parties in lust for the government," he added. NNI

UK returns 61 fake passports to Pakistani authorities

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): After the Saudi government handed over fake Pakistani passports to Islamabad, the British authorities have also returned 61 suspicious passports to the Pakistani authorities. The federal government has also instructed Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Immigration to investigate the matter.

Sources revealed that foreign nationals arrived in Britain using fake Pakistani passports after altering their Pakistani immigration data.

All the fake passports were handed over to Immigration and Passport authorities, sources added.

The lamination papers and data papers of the passports provided by the United Kingdom are fake.

The passports provided

are not printed at the Pakistan Passport and Immigration Printing Press, sources said.

From where the passports were printed and who are the facilitators are being investigated, said sources.

Immigration, name and parentage data were also entered incorrectly in the passport, sources said. The family tree of various people was also illegally used in the fake passport.

FIA had earlier also taken action against NADRA and passport authorities for making fake passports.

Sources revealed that Afghan citizens were involved in making fake passports in connivance with agents and government officials and FIA had taken action against 16 people for making fake passports. NNI

Maryam Nawaz's cabinet will initially consist of 16 ministers

LAHORE, Feb 14 (NNI): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) nominated Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's cabinet will initially consist of 16 ministers.

At the start only important ministries including education, law, health, information and broadcast-

ing will be announced. PML-N allies will also be included in the government.

Maryam Nawaz's cabinet will include Malik Ahmad Khan, Bilal Yasin, Khawaja Imran Nazir, Khawaja Salman Rafiq, Mian Mujtabi Shujaur Rehman, Uzma Bukhari and Rana Iskandar Hayat.

Three wanted members of snatcher gang arrested; valuables and weapon recovered

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): Islamabad Capital Police Sabzi Mandi police team have arrested three wanted members of former jailbird notorious snatcher gang known as (Faraz gang) involved in numerous snatching activities and recovered snatched motorbikes, mobile phones and weapons from their possession, a public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police officer (ICCPO) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police had categorically started a crackdown against criminal elements in order to save the precious lives and property of citizens.

Following these directions, the Sabzi Mandi police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending three wanted members of a notorious former jailbird snatcher gang involved in numerous snatching activities in various areas of Sabzi Mandi police station.

The accused were identified as Sarfraz (Gang Leader), Abdul Khaliq and Ahmed Shah. Police team also recovered two snatched motorbikes, mobile phones and weapons used in crime from their possession. Cases have already been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway.

ICCPO Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan directed all senior officials for effective crackdown against the accused involved in criminal activities and said that safety of the lives and property of the citizens is our prime responsibility and no laxity will be tolerated in this regard. NNI

ECP issues notifications of 5 dozen assembly members

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Wednesday issued notifications of around five dozen members of the National and Provincial Assemblies, including former federal ministers Ijaz-ul-Haq, Sheikh Aftab, and others.

Former federal minister Ijaz ul Haq, a candidate of Pakistan Muslim League (Zia-ul-Haq Shaheed) was notified as member of the National Assembly from NA-163, Bahawalnagar-IV, by securing 84,343 votes.

Sheikh Aftab Ahmed was declared as winner from NA-49, Attock-I with 120,158 votes and Malik Sohail Khan from NA-50, Attock-II with 118,288 votes.

Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians' (PPP) Jam Abdul Karim Bijar was notified victorious from NA-229, Malir-I; Syed Rafiullah from NA-230, Malir-

II; and Abdul Hakeem Baloch from NA-231, Malir-III, and Muttahida Qaumi Movement's Aasia Ishaque Siddique from NA-232, Karachi-I; Muhammad Jawed Hanif Khan from NA-233, Korangi, Karachi-II; Muhammad Moin Aamer Pirzada from NA-234, Korangi, Karachi-III; Muhammad Iqbal Khan from NA-235, Karachi East-I; Hassan Sabir from NA-236, Karachi East-II; Asad Alam Niazi (PPPP) from NA-237, Karachi East-III ; Sardar Nabil Ahmed Gabol (PPPP) from NA-239, Karachi South-I; Arshad Abdullah Vohra (MQM) from NA-240, Karachi South-II; Mirza Ikhtiar Baig (PPPP) from NA-241, Karachi South-III; and Syed Mustafa Kamal (MQM) from NA-242, Karachi Kaemari-I; Abdul Qadir Patel (PPPP) from NA-243, Karachi, Kaemari-II; Muhammad

Farooq Sattar (MQM) from NA-244, Karachi-West-I; Syed Hafeezuddin (MQM) from NA-245, Karachi West-II; Syed Amin Ul Haque (MQM) from NA-246, Karachi West-III; Khawaja Izhar Ul Hassan (MQM) from NA-247, Karachi Central-I; Khalid Maqbool Siddique (MQM) from NA-248, Karachi Central-II; Ahmed Saleem Siddiqui (MQM) from NA-249, Karachi Central-III; Farhan Chishti (MQM) from NA-250, Karachi Central-IV.

Those notified as returned candidates of Sindh Assembly included Muhammad Yousuf Baloch (PPPP) from PS-84 Malir-I; Muhammad Sajid from PS-85, Malir-II; Abdul Razaq Raja (PPPP) from PS-86, Malir-IV; Taj Muhammad Jamot (PPPP) from PS-87, Malir-IV; Ajaz Khan (Independent) from PS-88; Muhammad Saleem (PPPP) from PS-89, Malir-VI; Shariq Jamal (MQM)

SECP continues crack down on illegal personal loan apps

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) constantly monitors social media and websites for any illegal personal loan Apps (illegal apps) in order to safeguard the public from illicit loan sharks. Eight (8) further illicit apps have been identified by SECP.

These apps were being distributed to the public as Android Package Kit (APK) files via various APK websites, emails, and social media.

SECP has already initiated actions against these

illegal apps in coordination with Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA).

The SECP has so far blocked 132 illegal apps in active collaboration with Google, Apple, FIA and PTA.

The coordinated efforts made by SECP, Google, FIA and PTA have forced operators of illegal apps to divert their activities to APK websites, social media, etc. These illegal apps pose significant risks to user's safety including misuse of personal information/sensitive financial

data, fraud, blackmailing/harassment etc.

An updated list of Illegal Apps, as identified by SECP and reported to respective app stores, PTA and FIA, is placed on SECP website for information of public. The General Public is advised to only download SECP approved personal loan apps THAT ARE ONLY AVAILABLE on official app stores of Google and Apple. The list of SECP approved personal loan apps is also available on SECP Website for convenience of the general public. NNI

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa records lowest voter turnout

ISLAMABAD, Feb 14 (NNI): The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) has said that the lowest voter turnout in Pakistan's 12th general election was from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while Islamabad Capital Territory saw the highest number of voters.

According to a report by election watchdog, 60.6 million voters exercised their right to vote on February 8. "Nearly 5.8 million more people voted in general elections 2024, as compared to 2018 when 54.8 million had cast their votes," FAFEN said.

The report stated that despite an increase in voters, the turnout dipped from 52.1 per cent in 2018 to 47.6pc in 2024, primarily due to an increase in the number of registered voters from 106 million in 2018 to 128.6 million in 2024.

"In addition, harsh winter in parts of the country, fears of violence and terrorism in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan as well as uncertainty about the conduct of elections may have also adversely affected the turnout," it added.

The Fafen report is based on the analysis of Form 47 of the 264 National Assembly constituencies published on the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) website.

According to the report, the regional disaggregation of voter turnout for National Assembly constituencies shows a varied pattern with the lowest turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the highest in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

The turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa declined from 44 percent in 2018 to 39.5 percent in 2024, in ICT from 58.3 percent to 54.2 percent, in Punjab from 56.8 percent to 51.6 percent, in Sindh from 47.2 percent to 43.7 percent and in Balochistan from 45.3 percent to 42.9

percent.

While overall turnout declined by 4.5 percentage points, the highest decline was in Punjab where turnout dropped by 5.2 percentage points, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (4.5), ICT (4.1), Sindh (3.5) and Balochistan (2.4).

Meanwhile, the FAFEN reported, the decline in turnout as compared to 2018 was a ubiquitous phenomenon across major cities including the provincial capitals Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar and Karachi.

"Although the cumulative turnout of all 22 Karachi constituencies saw a declining trend, three Karachi districts namely Korangi, Karachi West (including newly carved out district Kemari) and Karachi Central registered a slight increase in the turnout while Malir, Karachi South and Karachi East recorded a decline," it stated. NNI



ISLAMABAD: FIA Director Anti Human Smuggling (AHS) Israr Ahmed Khan and SSDO Executive Director Syed Kausar Abbas exchanges the documents after signing the MoU at FIA headquarters. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO) have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaborate on various initiatives aimed at raising awareness, building capacity, campaigning, and coordinating stakeholders to address transnational organized crime, with a specific focus on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and Smuggling of Migrants (SOM) in Pakistan.