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Editor: Omer Rizwan

UN Security Council acts to boost aid to Gaza after US abstains

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 22 (Reuters) - The United Nations Security Council on Friday adopted a resolution to boost humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip that stopped short of a call for a ceasefire after a week of vote delays and intense negotiations to avoid a United States veto. The resolution "calls for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities." Amid global outrage over a rising Gaza death toll in 11 weeks of war between Israel and Hamas and a worsening humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave, the U.S. abstained to allow the 15-member council to adopt a resolution drafted by the United Arab Emirates. The remaining council members voted for the resolution except for Russia which also abstained, having favored an initial draft that



called for "an urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities" to allow aid access. The U.S. and Israel oppose a ceasefire, believing it would only benefit Hamas. Washington instead supports pauses in fighting to protect civilians and free hostages taken by Hamas "We believe that the resolution begins to unblock life saving aid, whose denial has condemned more than half a million people in Gaza

to famine," UAE U.N. Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh told the council after the vote. Following high-level negotiations to win over Washington, the resolution no longer dilutes Israel's control over all aid deliveries to 2.3 million people in Gaza. Israel monitors the limited aid deliveries to Gaza via the Rafah crossing from Egypt and the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing.

Canada and Taiwan Forge Historic Bilateral Investment Agreement

TAIPEI (Agencies): Canada and Taiwan finalized a bilateral investment deal on Friday, marking a significant step in Taiwan's efforts to enhance economic ties with democratic allies. The agreement, known as the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Arrangement, aligns with Canada's strategy to expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. For Taiwan, seeking support from major Western democracies like Canada is crucial amid mounting pressure from China. The deal, completed after talks in October, is seen as a milestone of "great historical significance" by Taiwan's Office of Trade Negotiations, anticipating strengthened supply chain connections and global resilience. The signing ceremony involved Jim Nickel, Canada's top diplomat in Taiwan, and Harry Tseng, Taiwan's de facto ambassador to Canada.

Pentagon updates rules on killing civilians



PENTAGON (Agencies): The US Department of Defense on Thursday published an instruction on "Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response," outlining new procedures to prevent noncombatants from getting hit and how to deal with it when it happens. The 52-page document was sent out to all branches of the military, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the combatant commands and lays out the new policies for "CHRM." "The release of the DOD instruction continues the process of improving the department's approach to mitigating and responding to civilian harm," Pentagon spokesman Major General Pat

Ryder told reporters at a press briefing on Thursday. The new policy is the result of two reviews of civilian casualty incidents in Syria, the Military Times reported. Both reviews were launched in 2021. One dealt with the 2019 bombing of Baghouz that killed "dozens" of noncombatants, while the other examined the fighting to reclaim Raqqa from Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS) in 2017. Both reviews found that the Pentagon "did not have codified policies on preventing civilian harm or handling its aftermath," according to the outlet. The newly published set of instructions calls for the military to identify what it needs to target and execute strikes more precisely, and directs the Defense Department to engage in "periodic dialogue and consultations with representatives and experts from civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations" regarding CHMR policy.

Doctors accuse Israeli troops of desecrating bodies and shooting civilians at hospital Israel says was Hamas 'command center'

TEL AVIV (CNN): Israeli soldiers raiding a hospital in northern Gaza desecrated the bodies of dead patients with bulldozers, let a military dog maul a man in a wheelchair, and shot multiple doctors even after vetting them for terror links, according to allegations by staff and patients. The claims relate to an eight-day operation by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) at the Kamal Adwan Hospital last week, which the military alleges was being used as a command and control center by Hamas. CNN spoke to two senior medical staff, another doctor and a patient at the hospital, who provided corroborating testimonies of what happened. CNN also reviewed video evidence for some of the claims. They paint a disturbing picture of how the IDF carried out the operation, as doctors were interrogated for their connections to Hamas and staff struggled to treat patients trapped inside. The IDF says that Hamas hides terrorist infrastructure in and around civilian institutions in Gaza, such as hospitals, and that targeting them is essential as it works to eliminate Hamas from the Gaza Strip. But its operations are contentious, with



humanitarian organizations saying that medical facilities in Gaza are rendered unable to provide basic services. Among the most serious allegations relating to the IDF's operations at Kamal Adwan is that, as troops were leaving the hospital complex, they used bulldozers to dig up bodies that had recently been buried in makeshift graveyards in the hospital's courtyard. "The soldiers dug up the graves this morning and dragged the bodies with bulldozers, then crushed the bodies with the bulldozers," said the hospital's head of pediatric services, Hossam Abu Safiya, in a phone interview on Saturday. "I have never seen such a thing before." Videos and images he shared with CNN show decomposing human remains scattered across the hospital grounds. The allegation was supported by the hospital's head of

nursing, Eid Sabbah, and another nurse, Asmaa Tanteesh. "The bodies outside in the courtyard were plowed in front of our eyes," Tanteesh told CNN. "All the while, we were shouting and screaming at them, but our screams fell on deaf ears." Satellite imagery taken on December 15 - right before the IDF withdrew from the hospital area - shows razed grounds outside the hospital complex. The IDF did not address the allegations directly when approached for comment by CNN but acknowledged that it had carried out an operation at the hospital. "The troops apprehended 80 terrorists, some of whom took part in the atrocious October 7th massacre," it said in a statement to CNN. Earlier this week, the IDF released a video of the interrogation of the hospital's director and published an accompanying statement saying he admitted it was being used for military purposes. It was unclear whether the statement was elicited under duress. Abu Safiya, the pediatrics director, and Sabbah, the chief nurse, countered that the hospital only provided medical services and that the arrestees were civilians and medical workers.

Plane Carrying 300 Indians Grounded in France Over Suspected Human Trafficking

PARIS (Agencies): A Nicaragua-bound flight with over 300 Indian passengers has been detained in France on suspicion of "human trafficking." The authorities, acting on an anonymous tipoff, held the aircraft,

stating that passengers were "likely to be victims of human trafficking." The investigation has been taken over by the national anti-organized crime unit JUNALCO. The A340, operated by Romanian company Legend Airlines,

remains grounded at Vatry airport. The passengers, primarily Indian nationals, were reportedly planning to travel to Central America with potential intentions of attempting illegal entry into the United States or Canada.

Russia to build crypto mining hub in Africa

MOSCOW (Agencies): Russian supplier of Bitcoin mining solutions BitCluster is building a 120-megawatt (MW) data center in Ethiopia, the company has announced on its website. According to a press release issued on Thursday, the facility will be located in the capital city of Addis Ababa, on the territory of the Kilinto high-voltage substation, and will comprise 30,000 square meters. The commissioning of the new data center will take place in January 2024, BitCluster said, noting that transformers are currently being connected. The report highlighted that the engineering and technical conditions of the data center meet the requirements of the most modern mining devices. "100% of



the data center's electricity comes from renewable energy sources, specifically from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the largest hydropower project in Africa, with a capacity of 5.15 GW," the press release reads. The new energy infrastructure of the Kilinto high-voltage substation will reportedly ensure "uninterrupted power supply to the facility with the expected uptime 99%."

Chinese-US military contacts resume - Beijing



WASHINGTON (Agencies): Official contacts between the US and Chinese militaries have resumed following a 16-month hiatus caused by US involvement in Taiwan. Beijing's defense ministry said in a statement that a videoconference on Thursday between Brown and Liu, the Chief of Staff of China's Central Military Commission Joint Staff Department, had

been organized at the behest of the US. During the talks Chinese General Liu Zhenli told US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Charles Q. Brown that Washington should develop the "right perception" towards Beijing in order for bilateral ties to improve, China's defense ministry reports. Beijing had put military-to-military contacts with Washington on hold after then-House speaker Nancy Pelosi's visited Taiwan in August 2022, which China deemed an "egregious provocation." However, at the summit between US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November, it was decided that the armed forces of the two nations will speak to each other again.

Macron to replace Biden as India's chief guest on Republic Day

BEIJING (Agencies): French President Emmanuel Macron is set to be the guest of honor at New Delhi's Republic Day celebrations on January 26, PTI news agency reported on Friday, citing sources. This past July, Modi travelled to Paris as chief guest on Bastille Day. India had earlier invited US President Joe Biden to witness the grand ceremony. However, reports emerged earlier this month that the US leader won't be able to make it. The Quad grouping summit scheduled to be held in the Indian capital in January has also been postponed. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invited Biden to be the chief guest for Republic Day during their bilateral meeting on September 8 on the sidelines of the G20



summit. Later, US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti confirmed that Biden had received an invitation. New Delhi was also looking to schedule the Quad Summit, which groups India, Australia, Japan and the US, for January 27 to align with Biden's planned visit. However, PTI reported on December 12 that the summit would be postponed and that Biden is likely to skip the trip.

Türkiye arrests hundreds for alleged ISIS links

ANKARA (Agencies): Turkish police and counterterrorism squads arrested 304 people suspected of ties to the Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) terrorist group, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced on X (formerly Twitter) on Friday. The arrests took place simultaneously across 32 provinces as part of 'Operation Heroes-34', he said, with most of the suspects apprehended in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir. Yerlikaya's post included footage showing heavily-armed authorities kicking in doors and handcuffing men whose faces were blurred out. The individuals' names have not been released as of Friday. The government has intensified its an-

tirterrorist operations in the last several months, following a bombing outside government buildings in Ankara in October that was attributed to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is considered a terrorist group in Türkiye. The blast killed a civilian and injured two police officers and resulted in 90 arrests of suspected group members. While IS has waned in influence in recent years since losing the territory it once controlled in Iraq and Syria, it has continued to conduct scattered strikes on both countries and has claimed responsibility for several destructive attacks in Türkiye, including a 2017 nightclub bombing that killed 39 people.

Ukraine Secures 5,000 Starlink Terminals From Poland

KYIV (Agencies): Ukraine has reportedly acquired 5,000 Starlink terminals from Poland, originally used for military purposes, including guiding UAVs and battlefield communications. The move follows SpaceX founder Elon Musk's denial of Starlink coverage over Crimea for Ukraine's military activities. The terminals are now intended for civilian use, providing internet access to households in war-affected areas and supporting public services like hospitals and schools. This shift suggests a



reduction in Starlink's military application due to concerns over potential escalation and electronic warfare threats.

About Khyber Mail The Khyber mail was first published in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1932. A newspaper in English by the eminent journalist Sheikh Sana Ullah. From 1932 to 1989 it has survived as leading English newspaper in the region by the sons of Sana Ullah i.e. Sheikh Zaka Ullah, Sheikh Inayat Ullah and Sheikh Saleem Ullah. The publication was shut down in 1989 due to various reasons. The current owner Rizwan Inayat son of Sheikh Inayat Ullah and grandson of Sheikh Sana Ullah, has restarted the family heritage but meeting with the requirement of the century, by giving the readers current happenings around the world with one touch anywhere any time and updating the reader to pace up with the world.

Household pollution posing serious threats to public health, environment By Adeel Saeed

PESHAWAR (APP):The increasing level of household pollution both in the shape of biomass and solid waste generation is posing serious threats to public health and the environment of the city. The air quality index in Peshawar in the current winter season has belled the alarm by recording a dangerous stage of more than 236 pollution levels; raising the status of the city to the most polluted in the country. According to environmental experts, the major source of air pollution is vehicular emission followed by household pollution in shape of the burning of fossil fuel, wood and waste for cooking at home. A recent study by Peshawar Clean Air Alliance (PCAA), a volunteer association of civil society individuals, found that transport is contributing 58.46 per-

cent in air pollution and is followed by household pollution making a contribution of 11.66 percent while waste burning 4.1 percent and dust 17.67 burning. It showed that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has one of the highest proportions of wood fuel usage, particularly in rural households and about half of Peshawar population lives in rural area. According to 2017 census, about 138000 households in Peshawar used wood as fuel for heating. The study titled 'Status of Air Pollution in Peshawar' finds that the annual Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) in Peshawar has ranged between 61.40 ug/m3 and 80.09 ug/mg3, exceeding the current national and provincial standards by 4 to 5 times and WHO air quality guidelines by 12-16 times. High level of PM 2.5 have a consid-

erable impacts on the population of Peshawar as the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) estimates that citizen of Peshawar can add up to 2.3 years to their life expectancy if air quality level meets the WHO's guidelines. Peshawar has been declared as the third most polluted city in Pakistan and the 9th most polluted in the world in the 2021 World Air Quality report, says Dr. Adil Zareef, a public health expert and convener of PCAA. Talking to APP, Dr. Adil said while evaluating the current year data of Peshawar air quality, the city has jumped from third most polluted city in Pakistan to number one. In November and December 2023, sometimes the air quality index of Peshawar crossed the pollution level of Lahore, the most polluted city of Pakistan.

E-Hujra Raises Serious Concerns Over MTI Board of Governors Appointments

PESHAWAR (Khyber Mail): In a recent online Zoom meeting organized by E-Hujra, members from diverse global locations expressed critical concerns regarding the recent appointment process of the Medical Teaching Institutions (MTI) Board of Governors (BOG) team. The discussion, which spanned various key points, highlighted issues in the selection and appointment criteria under the MTI Act. Key concerns discussed during the meeting include: Search and Nominations Council: Questions were raised about the transparency and fairness of the Search and Nominations Council's role in identifying and nominating individuals for key positions. Notification Process: Concerns were raised regarding the dissemination of notifications related to nominations, suggesting potential issues with the transparency of



the selection process. Policy Positions: Despite the existence of policy-making positions and the convening of selection committee meetings, there is evidence of a deviation from appointing individuals based on merit and professionalism. Political Influence: Members expressed dismay over the trend of political figures securing positions on the board, contrary to the initial expectation of having qualified professionals. Consensus Approval of Policies.

“Kalam Natamam” Unveiled: Prof. Dr. Tariq Mufti’s Autobiography Launched by Bazm-e-Ilm-o-Fun Pakistan at Abbottabad Event



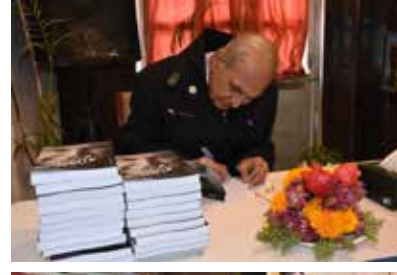
Abbottabad (Khyber Mail): Bazm-e-Ilm-o-Fun Pakistan Hazara Branch recently hosted an elegant book launch event to introduce “Kalam Natamam,” the autobiography penned by Prof. Dr. Tariq Saeed Mufti. Anayatullah Waseem graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, adding significance to the celebration. Ahmed Hussain Mujahid and Dr. Munawar Aziz presented papers, contributing to the literary ambiance of the event. During the ceremony, Prof. Dr. Tariq Mufti personally distributed autographed copies of his book, setting a personal and celebratory tone. Prof. Dr. Aamir Sohail, in his introduction, emphasized the book's distinctive features, highlighting the author's use of accessible language to establish a profound connection between the reader and the



narrator's journey. The autobiography vividly portrays the social and cultural tapestry of a bygone era, resonating deeply with the personalities mentioned. The narrative skillfully navigates the author's events and struggles, immersing the reader in the emotional spectrum experienced by Prof. Dr. Tariq Mufti. Dr. Munawar Aziz shared heartwarming experiences from his long-standing friendship with the author, while Ahmed Hussain Mujahid presented selected excerpts that shed light on the writer's philosophical reflections, offering valuable life lessons. Wahid Siraj, President



of Bazm-e-Ilm-o-Fun, extended congratulations to the esteemed writer, praising his command of language. Anayatullah Waseem, the ceremony's President, shared personal anecdotes about his association with Prof. Dr. Tariq Mufti, offering candid insights into the personalities discussed in the book. The book, crafted and digitally printed by Khyber Mail (Printers & Publishers) Peshawar, received high praise from the attentive audience. The event brought together the intellectual elite of Hazara, enhancing the success and cultural significance of the book launch.



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disputes, and security concerns. International actors advocate for a two-state solution, but reaching a consensus on specific terms and boundaries remains elusive. A peaceful resolution requires meaningful dialogue, compromise, and a genuine desire for reconciliation from all parties involved.

Farhatulain Shaikh - Ghotki

Private Power Infrastructure Board, CERAD, and Huawei jointly launched the White Paper on Arc Fault Circuit Interruptor (AFCI) for PV Systems in Pakistan

Islamabad (Adnan Hameed): PPIB, CERAD, and Huawei Pakistan on Tuesday jointly unveiled the White Paper on Arc Fault Circuit Interrupter (AFCI) for Photovoltaic (PV) systems, marking a significant stride in the realm of solar power technology. The launch, a result of collaborative efforts with Private Power & Infrastructure Board (PPIB) and the Center for Advanced Research in Engineering and Development (CERAD), is poised to redefine the landscape of PV power plant development in the country. The event, adorned with a technical white paper launch ceremony, featured Chief Executive Officer of Huawei Pakistan, Ethan Sun, , who in his welcome address, emphasized importance of the AFCI in advancing technological frontiers,



providing a comprehensive reference for enterprises involved in PV power plant development. He said the objective is to establish a foundation for technological development and promotions. He said this technical white paper will serve as a guiding document for enterprises, enabling them to continuously enhance their products in response to evolving situations and application requirements. Ethan Sun said this document serves

as a comprehensive guide for industry stakeholders, elucidating the development background, technical principles, challenges, features, and the tangible results of AFCI technology verification and evaluation. On the occasion, Managing Director of Private Power & Infrastructure Board, Shah Jahan Mirza lauded Huawei's commitment to technological advancement and expressed optimism that the introduction of this cutting-edge technology would play a pivotal role in addressing Pakistan's power challenges. Shah Jahan Mirza, in his speech said that the Technical White Paper on Intelligent DC Arc Detection (AFCI) for PV Systems, jointly released by PPIB, CERAD, and Huawei, serves as a comprehensive guide for the industry.

SAPM Mushaal Hussein Mullick Champions Health Rights, Urges Collective Action Against 'White Poisons' at PANAHA Event

Islamabad (Adnan Hameed): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussein Mullick, has declared health a basic right of all individuals. She has highlighted the link between mental and physical health, healthy dietary choices, and lifestyle. Speaking as the Chief Guest at a media and civil society awareness campaign organized by the Pakistan National Heart Association (PANAHA), Mushaal underscored the pivotal role of a balanced lifestyle in fostering overall health. The event was attended by Surgeon General (Rtd.) Kamal Akbar, Sabien Hussein Mullick (Focal Person to SAPM), Sanaullah Ghumman (Secretary General PANAHA), Munawar Hussain (Advocacy consultant), Abid Abbassi (President Rawalpindi/Islamabad Union of Journalists), and other prominent personalities from the media and civil society. The event was a platform to promote awareness and dialogue on the crucial link between health, nutrition, and lifestyle



choices. Mushaal expressed deep concern over the alarming statistic that places Pakistan as the third highest in the world for diabetes cases. She urged individuals not to take their health for granted. She stressed that adopting proper dietary habits and incorporating regular physical exercise could serve as effective preventive measures against numerous diseases. Mushaal advocated for efforts to raise awareness among mothers about their children's diets, emphasizing the profound impact on the health of future generations. She underscored that schools and colleges should also be included in these awareness campaigns as educational institutions are where many children develop dietary habits, both positive and negative.

Jinnah: A charismatic leader who crafts Pakistan on world's map by peaceful democratic struggle Raziq Ali Shah

ISLAMABAD (APP): Father of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the charismatic leader of the 20th century, whose matchless peaceful and democratic struggle not only changed the world geography in the shape of Pakistan on the globe's map but also won applause from across the borders. Renowned US academics, historian and writer Stanley Wolpert, in his famous book 'Jinnah of Pakistan' published in 1984 while paying tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah said, "Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Muhammad Ali Jinnah did all three." Similarly, Nehru's sister Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pundit was of the view, "If the Muslim League had 100 Gandhis and 200 Azads and Congress had only one Jinnah, then India would not have been divided." These remarks are solid proof that our great leader Quaid e Azam bravely fought the case of Muslims of the sub-continent and achieved historical success in the shape of Pakistan purely through a democratic and peaceful struggle. The renowned international experts had made a praiseworthy endeavour, to sum up different aspects of the life, personality, and leadership qualities of the great Quaid

during the Pakistan Movement, who created a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Subcontinent on August 14, 1947, within seven years of adoption of the historic Pakistan Resolution at Lahore on March 23, 1940. Pakistan Resolution had set a clear roadmap for the Muslims of the subcontinent and Quaid-e-Azam materialized it through his visionary leadership. The father of the Nation had laid always a great emphasis on education and constructive criticism on the government for the sake of improvement and reformation rather than for political and personal gains. Seeing the charisma and strong determination of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Muslims got united under the flag of All India Muslim League (AIML) founded on December 30, 1906 gave new impetus to the Independence and Pakistan Movement. The historic movement witnessed further acceleration after the historic Allabad address delivered by the legendary poet Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal during the 25th annual session of AIML in 1930 in which he outlined a clear vision of an independent state for Muslims majority provinces in northwestern India, thus becoming the first politician to articulate about two nation-theory that Muslims are a distinct nation and deserve political independence.

Collective issues of South Waziristan's tribes to be resolved: Commissioner

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Commissioner Zafar ul Islam Khattak Dera region has said that solid measures would be taken to address collective issues of all South Waziristan's tribes through mutual consultation. He expressed these views while addressing a jirga of Ahmedzai wazir tribe' elders at the upper camp during his visit to the South Waziristan Lower's headquarters Wana. He said that steps were being taken to resolve collective issues of the tribesmen relating to land disputes, complaints against public offices and genuine demands of those protesting at the border of Angoor Adda. Deputy Commissioner South Waziristan Lower Muhammad Nasir

Khan, Deputy Commissioner South Waziristan Upper Ashfaq Khan, and Assistant Commissioner Wana Faisal Ismail also accompanied him. He said efforts would be made to build the road starting from the Wana area of Kar Kanra after mutual consultation with the tribal community for the convenience of the population. He also highlighted the positive role of the Ahmad Zai wazir tribe in the wake of the war against terrorism, saying the government was acknowledging their sacrifices. On this occasion, Malik Alauddin, Malik Yar Muhammad, Malik Jameel, Malik Tariq, and Malik Syed Allah Wazir presented their issues and demands.

Ministry renovates 2,377 houses, flats in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Works Department (PWD), Ministry of Housing and Works has upgraded and renovated as many as 2,385 houses and flats in various sectors of Islamabad during the last five and half years. "The PWD has carried out EM works of as many as 1,365 flats and houses while around 1,012 civil work is executed of different categories, an official in the ministry told APP. The official said the ministry has owned as many as 5,253 houses and flats of categories-I to categories-V located in various sectors in the federal capital. He said the Capital Development Authority (CDA) was responsible for the maintenance and renovation of Pak Secretariat, Islamabad, therefore, no fund has been spent on ministry's renovation. The official said the PWD has started sending notices to the allottees of government accommodation in Sector I-9/4 about payment of electric meter bills for water motors installed at residential blocks. He said

the Finance Division had allocated funds for payment of utilities in the relevant heads of accounts of the users while utility bills of the residential accommodation including hostels, rest houses and judicial residences should be paid by the users. To a question, he said the Ministry of Housing and Works has allocated an amount of Rs 5.80 million in the current financial year 2023-2024 for electricity bills of Qasr-e-Naz Lodge, South Zone Karachi due to financial constraints. "Out of the total Rs 5.80 million, only an amount of Rs 0.87 million have been released at the rate of 15 percent in this regard so far," he added. He said that the Karachi Electric Supply Company bill was Rs 7.26 million for the month of September, 2023 along with arrears and the electricity connection had been disconnected in June, 2023. As per the statement of K-Electric, the official said that the electricity connection would be restored after payment of complete amount along with arrears.

4.4 magnitude earthquake jolts Islamabad, other parts of country

ISLAMABAD (APP): An earthquake measuring 4.4 on the Richter scale jolted Islamabad and other parts of the country in the wee hours of Friday, Dunya News reported. Tremors were also felt in several cities of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Kashmir. People came out of their homes in panic and started reciting verses from the Holy Quran. No loss of life and property was reported from any part of the country due to earthquake. According to National Seismic Monitoring Centre, Islamabad, the epicenter of the earthquake was located in the South-western Kashmir at the depth of 11 kilometres.

IRSA releases 61,900 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 61,900 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 36,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1474.77 feet and was 74.77 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 18,000 cusecs and 22,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1156.55 feet, which was 106.55 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,700 cusecs and 26,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 27,800, 31,600, 26,000 and 500 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 6,900 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 2,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

ECP extends deadline for nomination papers

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has extended the deadline for submitting nomination papers by two days, allowing submissions until Sunday. According to the revised schedule issued by the Election Commission, candidates interested in contesting elections can obtain and submit their nomination papers from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm until Sunday. The initial list of candidates is set to be released on December 24, with the scrutiny of nomination papers scheduled for December 25 to December 30. The last date for filing appeals against the Returning Officers' decisions on rejecting or accepting nomination papers will be Jan 03 and the final date for deciding the appeals of candidates by an appellate tribunal will be Jan 10. The revised list of candidates will be published on Jan 11 and the last date for withdrawing one's candidature is Jan 12. The revised list of candidates will be published on Jan 12. Electoral symbols will be assigned to candidates on January 13, and the general elections are scheduled to be held on February 8. The cost for acquiring the nomination papers is set at Rs. 100. Each candidate is allowed to submit a maximum of five nomination papers, each with different endorsers.

Motorists asked to drive carefully during foggy season

ISLAMABAD (APP): The traffic police and Motorways Police on Friday expanded its awareness drives and appealed to motorists to drive carefully especially during the night hours and in the morning during the formation of fog to avoid accidents. National Highway & Motorway Police (NHMP) spokesperson talking to a private news channel asked travellers and tourists to avoid unnecessary mobility and must keep fog lights turned on duration of their journey on highways and motorways. He explained that the thick fog has badly affected the flow of road traffic in several cities of Punjab and KPK,

adding, that people through media platforms have repeatedly been requested to stay home and avoid unnecessary traveling. He said that the load of the traffic has increased in the cities due to the closure of the Motorway, and further directed the traffic officers to use reflectors and flasher lights as indicators for the drivers. "Avoid overtaking other cars when there is fog because it becomes difficult to judge the distance," he added. He said motorists must carefully listen to awareness messages disseminated by police via social media to avoid crashes during this inclement weather conditions.

Tourist resorts witnessing rush after children's winter holidays: report

ISLAMABAD (APP): With the start of children's winter holidays, most of the tourist resorts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially those in AJK, Abbottabad, Swat, Naran, Kaghan, and Malam Jabba have been witnessing a huge rush of visitors who are enjoying the picturesque beauty of hill stations with their family members. Famous hilly tourist destinations in Pakistan are no less than any other international vacation spots as scenic views and beautiful landscapes have been enhancing the beauty of nature during snowfall season every year, said a report aired by a private news channel. According to residents of the Northern parts, a large number of families have planned to visit these areas with their families to enjoy the pic-

turesque beauty of hilly areas and enjoy snowfall, taking advantage of winter vacations, adding, several local as well as international tourists was witnessing significant increase after the first snowfall of the season. According to visitors, like every year this year too many tourists are interested in seeing snowfall, and winter vacations are the best opportunity for families to plan their trips to the beautiful hilly areas. Hill stations in Pakistan are the perfect option to spend an adventurous and fun-filled vacation with your friends and family, said a group of youngsters. Malam Jabba is a world-famous paradise for tourists. The charming green valleys, pastures, and meadows are the main source of attraction for people," said a local.

Gul-e-Daudi exhibition to be held in current month

MULTAN (APP): The annual chrysanthemum (Gul-e-Daudi) exhibition organized by the Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) would be held in the current month to provide recreational activities to citizens. Additional Secretary Housing Rana Akhlaq Ahmad expressed these views during a tree plantation drive at Quaid-e-Azam Park here on Friday. Director Admin and Finance Muhammad Akhtar Mundhera, Director Engineering Adnan Butt and Deputy Director Horticulture Chaudhary Ghulam Nabi were also present.

He said that PHA was committed to making Multan city green and the department has been given the task of planting shady trees in green belts and parks of the city. The tree plantation was being made at the entrance and exit points of the city while the plantation of local shady trees was underway at Shujaabad, Matital, and other places. He further said that PHA Multan has been given the task of planting more trees. PHA was taking steps to provide facilities to people and construction projects in new parks will be completed soon, he concluded.

Sale of second-hand winter clothes gains momentum Farhat Fatima

ISLAMABAD (APP): The sale of winter clothes, particularly second-hand, has gained momentum as many stalls selling woolies can be seen in different areas of the Federal capital – the latest rising trend of second-hand stuff is going to overtake fast fashion in the next few years. Heaps of second-hand quilts, blankets and rugs are up for sale at weekly Sunday bazaars. The main advantage of buying second-hand clothing is that it is much cheaper than buying new. All kinds of wear and accessories including gloves, woolen hats, mufflers, pullovers, sweaters, shirts and jackets

are also seen hanging in front of shops and stalls of weekly bazaars. Crowds of people, both poor and rich, can be seen bargaining with retailers in markets and Sunday bazaars. According to the World Economic Forum, the market value of secondhand clothing has reached \$24 billion by 2018 and is expected to double in the middle of the next decade. Muhammad Khan, a buyer at H-9 Weekly Bazaar said that second-hand clothes were once affordable for the people but now the exorbitant rates of clothes in these bazaars have created a sense of frustration among them.

11-member team appointed to monitor election campaigns in Dera

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): An 11-member team has been appointed to monitor the election campaigns of political parties and candidates during the upcoming general elections in the district. According to notification issued by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Additional Deputy Commissioner Ahad Yousaf has been appointed as the District Monitoring Officer(DMO) for Dera Ismail Khan district. Other members of the team included Tehsil Municipal Officer Paharpur Hamidullah Khan and Principal Government High school Paniala Nawab Khan for PK-111, Dera Ismail Khan-I, Executive Engineer Irrigation Paharpur Division Muhammad Rizwan and Assistant Excise and Taxation Officer Faheem Nawaz Khan for PK-

112 Dera Ismail Khan II. Similarly, Deputy Controller Examinations of Gomal University Muhammad Irfan Khan and Tehsil Municipal Officer Dera Muhammad Ajmal Khan have been appointed as monitoring officers for PK-113 Dera Ismail Khan III. For PK-114 Dera Ismail Khan IV, District Health Officer Dr. Mahmood Jan and Assistant Accountant Sher Wahab while Secretary of the Dera education board Muhammad Rahman and Assistant Finance Officer Qudratullah Khan to monitor election campaign for Pk 115, Dera Ismail Khan-V. These officers would monitor election campaigns of political parties and candidates in their respective Constituencies in light of code of conduct notified by the election commission in this regard.

Dist admin to ensure fire safety measures in commercial buildings, business centres

MULTAN (APP): District administration has decided to ensure fire safety measures in commercial buildings and business centers. Deputy Commissioner Rizwan Qadeer expressed these views while presiding over a fire safety committee meeting here on Friday. District Emergency Officer Rescue 1122 Dr. Muhammad Kaleem, Assistant Commissioners, and representatives of district departments attended the meeting. He ordered the departments concerned to seal plazas and

markets over not making fire-fighting safety arrangements. The survey of dangerous and dilapidated buildings has also been started and warning notices served to the City Tower, Sharif Complex, Mall of Cantt and Multan Trade Center. Rizwan said that NOC would not be given to any building without a fire system and building laws. He directed the Municipal Corporation to take strict action against the owners of dilapidated buildings in walled city areas.

Pakistan Railways to expand 96 trains network till Monday

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a bid to accommodate passengers, Pakistan Railways would expand the network of its express trains to 96 till December 25, running all over the country to better felicitate the commuters. “Before completing the network of 96 trains over the entire railway network, the last year the figure of trains is 86 which will be improved after the concentrate efforts of the department,” an official in the Ministry told APP. He said the facilities being provided to the passengers at railway stations include waiting rooms, vending stalls, station restaurants, wheel chairs, information desk, computer reservation facilities, public address system to inform pub-

lic about arrival/departure of trains, provision of paramedics and 1st aid facility, online reservation facility, passenger insurance service and revival of help desks at stations facilities in trains. To a question, he said the overall punctuality ratio of trains has improved from 76 to 93 percent in three months owing to close monitoring and stern measures taken by Pakistan Railways at the divisional and ministry levels. “With the punctuality of trains and concrete measures taken by the department in last three months, the number of passengers has increased by over 20 million, which is ample proof of the department’s achievement,” he added.

ANF launches operation to rehabilitate drug addicts in Peshawar

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has launched an operation in Peshawar to rehabilitate drug addicts. Operation “Da Haq Awaaz” was conducted with the support of Rehabilitation Center Peshawar. The operation was conducted in Hayatabad, Factory Market and Industrial Area. Initially, 26 drug addicts were shifted to ‘Da Haq Awaaz’ Rehabilitation Center Peshawar and provided with clothes, food and bedding according to hygiene rules. Blood screening of

these individuals was done to determine drug addiction. The best medical facilities are being provided to these people during the rehabilitation process. Efforts are also being made to search for the families of the victims. The district administration and social welfare department fully cooperated in the operation. In the next phase, 100 more drug addicts would be rehabilitated. The aim of the operation is to make the drug addicts useful citizens of the society, the spokesman said.

Three dacoits arrested days after snatching Rs 350,000 from company official

MULTAN (APP):Local police have arrested three dacoits and recovered Rs 350,000 cash they had snatched from manager of a medicine company four days back, police said on Friday. Police spokesman said that an employee of the company was among those arrested for being involved in the criminal activity. Abid Sohail, the manager of Khan Medicine Enterprises, told police that Abid and another employee Usman were on a regular visit for recovery from medical stores. When they reached near Al-Khalil mosque, two unknown accused snatched Rs

350,000 cash at gun point and escaped. Daulat gate police had reached the site, registered FIR and started investigations under supervision of SP City Hassan Raza Khakhi. SDPO Shahzad Gull, SHO Shoaib Ahmad and their team arrested the three accused including Usman alias Seth, the employee of the company. The other two accused arrested included Sheryar alias Shery and Akash. Police recovered Rs 350,000 cash and the weapon used in the crime. CPO Sadiq Ali appreciated the police team on their success.

Global peace can be achieved by uniting people across all faiths: Mushaal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussein Mullick, has emphasized that true global peace can be achieved through the unity of people from diverse faiths. Speaking at a Christmas cake-cutting ceremony arranged by the Nazriya Pakistan Council, she underscored the importance of fostering harmony and understanding among individuals of different religious backgrounds. Sabien Hussein Mullick (Focal Person to SAPM), Mian Javed

(Chairman Nazriya Pakistan Council), Manzoor Maseh (Executive Member Nazriya Pakistan Council), Faisal Zahid Malik, Salahuddin (Former High Commissioner of Pakistan to United Kingdom), Ms. Nargis and Mr. Khalid Suleri were among the attendees. Mushaal highlighted the universal values of love, sacrifice and peace embedded in every religion. She said that during her meeting with Vatican pope she had emphasized fostering Multi-Faith Harmony as a key driver for enduring global peace.

Educationist advocates for meaningful engagement of kids during winter breaks



ISLAMABAD (APP): An educationist on Friday emphasised the importance of purposeful activities to keep children intellectually stimulated during the winter breaks. “Winter breaks are not just about leisure; they are a valuable time to enhance a child’s cognitive abilities and creativity,” Dr. Ayesha told a private news channel, urging parents to consider activities that foster both the academic and personal development of kids. She suggested incorporating structured learning opportunities into the break,

including reading challenges where kids explore diverse genres or even take on writing projects to express their thoughts. She stressed the need for family engagement in educational games, as it not only reinforces

learning but also strengthens the parent-child bond. Board games, puzzles, and even strategic video games can be valuable when enjoyed together. Sadia also recommended hands-on learning for children through experiments and projects. “Simple science experiments related to winter phenomena can ignite curiosity. From creating a mini-snowstorm in a mini jar to studying the science behind frost, these activities stimulate a child’s interest in the world around them.

1100 liter adulterated milk, 800 rotten eggs wasted

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): Food safety team wasted about 1100 liter adulterated milk and rotten eggs at Chenab Bridge and Multan Road respectively here Friday morning. According to spokesman of Punjab Food Authority (PFA) the measure was taken after holding blockage at the said points simultaneously by the food safety teams. There were clear traces of water and powder found in the milk when got checked through lactometer device whereas the eggs were spotted as rotten and smelly to be used for manufacturing cakes and biscuits, it was said. All external and internal routs of the city have been fortified to contain entry of unhealthy and adulterated eatables into the district, said official of PFA.

DIKhan police arrest mobile phones snatcher

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The district police of DIKhan arrested a thief and recovered four stolen mobile phones from his possession in the limits of Parowa police station on Friday. According to the police spokesman, Parowa police station received the complaint from Saadullah son of Ghulam Muhammad resident of Jhok Sikandar that a person named Amanullah broke the lock of his mobile phone shop and stole 07 mobile phones from different companies. After receiving complaint Parowa Police Station under the leadership of SDPO Parowa Circle Anwar Khattak along with SHO Bilal Khan took immediate action and arrested the accused Amanullah son of Faiz Muhammad resident of Parowa as per the rules. Police recovered 04 mobile phones and cash from 3 sold mobile phones amounting to Rs. 40000/- from the possession of the accused.

Christmas cake-cutting ceremony held

FAISALABAD (APP): A Christmas cake-cutting ceremony was organised at Faisalabad Development Authority (FDA) complex to express solidarity with the Christian employees. FDA Additional Director General Junaid Hasan Manj, Sadaqat Ali Baloch, Revolutionary Workers Union President and other officials and staff cut the cake, along with the Christian employees and greeted them on their religious event. He said the Christian employees were playing an equal role in the public service and stability of the institution. The Christian employees thanked all FDA officers and said that they would spare no effort in fulfilling their departmental responsibilities.

RPO pins SP rank’s badge to newly promoted officer

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Regional Police Officer (RPO) Dera Ismail Khan, Nasir Mehmood Satti along with District Police Officer Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani on Friday pinned badge of Superintendent of Police (SP) rank to newly promoted police officer Arshad Mehmood. The RPO congratulated the promoted officer on his promotion and wished him all the best in the future. Speaking on the occasion, the RPO said the promoted officer achieved this position with hard work and ability, adding, the departmental promotions and higher ranks actually reflected additional responsibilities.

Wheat sowing completed over 99.63% areas, crop sown over 22.14 mln acres: Commissioner

ISLAMABAD (APP): The wheat crop has been sown across more than 22.14 million acres of land in various crop-growing regions during the current Rabi season in order to meet staple food requirements as well as to maintain strategic reserves throughout the year. The crop sowing targets for the current season (2023-24) were fixed at 22.23 million acres as the cultivation targets achieved by 99.63 per cent, said Food Security Commissioner Imtiaz Ali Gopang on Friday. The crop sowing was in full swing across the wheat-producing areas in the country as Punjab Province has surpassed its wheat sowing targets and completed cultivation of over 103.08 per cent of areas against the set targets, he added. The Punjab, which is the largest wheat-pro-

ducing province of the country, has completed crop sowing over 16.48 million acres as compared to the fixed targets of 16.00 million acres during the current season, he said adding that more areas to come under crop cultivation during the days to come. Meanwhile, Sindh Province has achieved 94.76 per cent of its targets as wheat cultivation in different divisions of the province was completed over 2.82 million acres as against the set targets of 2.97 million acres, he added. So far the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has achieved wheat sowing over 98.72 per cent of its set targets and crop cultivation was completed over 1.90 million acres as compared to the set targets of 1.93 million acres during the current sowing season, he added.

Financial help cheques given to THQ hospitals, vocational institutes

SIALKOT (APP): Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) General Syed Asad Raza Kazmi, on behalf of the District Zakat Committee Sialkot, handed over cheques worth Rs. 2.485 million to Tehsil Headquarters (THQ) hospitals of Daska, Pasrur and Sambrir for treatment of the deserving patients, according to a press release issued here on Friday. The ADC-G also handed over cheques worth Rs. 9.604 million for three vocational training institutes, the first installment of MORA [Ministry of Religious Affairs] scholarships (Technical) for technical education to deserving students and cheques for the year 2023-2024 were distributed to the

heads of institutions. According to details, Rs. 4.124 million were given to Vocational Training Institute Boys Sialkot, Rs. 2.060 million to the Vocational Training Institute Sialkot and Rs. 3.420 million to Vocational Training Institute Pasrur. For treatment of deserving patients, Health Welfare Committee of THQ Hospital Daska was given Rs.1.380 million and THQ Hospital Pasrur Rs. 644,000. Assistant Commissioner Sialkot Ghulam Sarwar, District Zakat Officer Sialkot Muhammad Zaheer Ashraf, Deputy Director (DD) Social Welfare Sharif Ghuman, Principal Vocational Training Institutes and Medical Social Officers were also present.

Education minister for reforming examination, assessment system

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Madad Ali Sindhi, Friday, stressed the need for a paradigm shift in educational examinations and assessment systems to align them with the requirements of the era of modern technology. Examinations and assessment were pillars of the educational system and we have to adopt those measures which encourage critical thinking, creative abilities and practical implementation of knowledge, he said while addressing the inaugural session of the 2-day IBCC 1st Annual Conference titled “ Examination and Assessment Practices in Pakistan”. The conference, organized by the Inter Board Coordination Commission (IBCC) here at a private university, was attended by vice-chancellors of

universities, chairmen of different boards of education from across the country, academicians, teaching faculty and students. Madad Ali Sindhi, addressing the occasion, said that with extensive research and advent of modern technologies educational scenarios around the globe were transforming rapidly and it was essential for Pakistan to bring necessary changes in its examination and assessment systems accordingly. Underscoring the significance of utilizing advanced technologies in assessment the minister stated that the use of digital technology in the examination could help improve the educational system. He also urged the need to take pivotal steps for maintaining standards of fairness, honesty and transparency in the system.

PNCA in collaboration with Saira Peter arranged special Christmas celebrations

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) in collaboration with Saira Peter arranged special Christmas celebrations here at PNCA, Auditorium on Friday titled “Bethlehem’s Christmas”. Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Jamal Shah was the chief guest on the occasion, with Adviser and Culture Expert Muhammad Kashif Irshad and Director General PNCA Muhammad Ayuob Jamali also in attendance and Zafar Francis moderated the overall programme. The event began with a video message by a Palestinian pastor explaining how Palestinian churches are not celebrating Christmas this year due to the horrific bloodshed and tragedy befalling Palestine’s children. Accompanied by a backdrop of powerful images, Sufi opera

singer Saira Peter performed songs themed around Palestine’s suffering children, calling for interfaith harmony and an end to violence. The programme also featured video messages of peace from around the world. In his remarks, Federal Minister Jamal Shah highly praised Saira Peter for collaborating with PNCA to mark Christmas in a befitting manner. He said that the role of the Christian community is of key importance in the prosperity of the country. The Federal Minister commended Saira Peter’s demonstration that music is much more than entertainment, remarking on the power of the Arts to communicate society’s issues. He cited her moving depiction of the Palestinian genocide through a potent combination of songs, carols and images which could not be ignored.

Tesla acquires land for Shanghai Megapack battery factory

SHANGHAI (Agencies): Tesla Inc has acquired land to build its Shanghai Megapack factory that will have capacity to produce 10,000 battery packs a year, according to a company representative, paving the way for construction to begin. The US electric vehicle maker, which also runs other projects like energy storage and super computers, previously said construction for the facility was scheduled to start in the third



quarter of this year and production would begin in the second quarter of 2024. Most of the megapacks manufactured will be for export. The Shanghai location is Tesla's

second dedicated Megapack factory, following the Lathrop plant in California. Tesla's EV facility in Nevada can also make the Megapack. Tesla's energy generation business is a fast growing revenue stream. The unit recorded US\$1.6 billion in revenue in the third quarter, up 40%, driven by sales of the Megapack, a battery that helps stabilise the grid and prevent outages, according to company reports.

Blackstone to buy 80% of Sony Payment unit for US\$280mil

NEW YORK (Agencies): Blackstone Inc. will take a majority stake in a payment service provider under Sony Group Corp. for about US\$280 million, a person familiar with the matter said. The world's largest alternative asset manager will buy 80% of Sony Payment Services Inc in a transaction that is expected to be announced as soon as Friday, said the person, who asked not to be identified because the matter is private. A representative for Blackstone declined to comment. Sony didn't respond to requests for comment. A household name for its electronics and entertainment of-



ferings, Sony Group also operates a financial services business which includes Sony Bank and its subsidiary Sony Payment. Sony Bank will keep a 20% minority stake in the payment business, which is valued in total at 50 billion yen (US\$350 million), the person said. Shares of Sony Group were little changed in early Tokyo

trading Friday. The deal comes as more Japanese corporations become open to selling off non-core business holdings, mainly to private equity investors eager to increase the value of the operations. Last month, Panasonic Holdings Corp. said it plans to sell part of its automotive systems unit to an affiliate of Apollo Global Management Inc. Sony Payment offers payment processing services for business clients, similar to Block Inc's Square. In Japan, nearly two-thirds of payments are still made in cash, signaling potential for growth of electronic payments.

Policy interest rates likely peaked, but descent will be slow, says Fitch Ratings

PETALING JAYA (Agencies): Policy interest rates in the US, the Eurozone, and the UK have now likely reached peaks for this tightening cycle, after being on hold since the third quarter of 2023 (Q3 2023), said Fitch Ratings. Henceforth, it is expected to see rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve (Fed), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the Bank of England (BOE), although easing will be slower and shallower than currently expected by financial markets. "We expect policy rates to fall 75 basis points by the end of 2024 in all three economies, taking



the Fed Funds rate (upper band) to 4.75%, the ECB Main Refinancing Rate to 3.75% and BOE Bank Rate to 4.5%," said the credit rating agency in a statement. It noted that major central banks have kept their policy rates unchanged in recent months. "Concurrently, headline consumer price index (CPI) infla-

tion rates have fallen quite quickly, with earlier monetary policy tightening resulting in household and corporate credit flows slowing rapidly," it said. Fitch Ratings also pointed out that the US household debt growth (seasonally adjusted annual rate) fell in Q3 2023 to 2.5% and non-financial corporate debt growth slowed to just 1.5%, well down on rates seen in late 2022. "The fall in credit growth is even more pronounced in the Eurozone, where household and corporate credit growth rates fell to the lowest levels seen in many years.

Cybertruck designer says stainless steel pickup is no experiment

LOS ANGELES (Agencies): The angular, polarising design of the Cybertruck will help boost the Tesla brand, the electric vehicle maker's chief designer said on Thursday, adding that the pickup was no experiment. "Love it or hate it, it's a conversation starter, and it gets people talking about the brand," Tesla chief designer Franz von Holzhausen said at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles, which is adding Cybertruck models to a Tesla exhibit. The long-delayed Cybertruck starts at a price of US\$60,990, over 50% more than what CEO Elon Musk



had touted in 2019, with a smaller range than originally promised. But it is drawing interest from people who have never owned a truck, with some potential owners queuing up for it at some Tesla showrooms, von Holzhausen said. "Just because it looks different doesn't mean that it can't be potentially a high volume

vehicle," he added, saying the pickup measures up to the performance of traditional rivals. "There seems to be this air of doubt." "We're bringing people into the market that never would have owned a truck before," von Holzhausen said. "And so I don't think it's an experiment." The stainless-steel clad truck is all angles, in part because a traditional press can't bend the steel into curves. The Lamborghini Countach, also an aggressively angular car, had also inspired the design, as had Lockheed's F-117 Stealth Fighter jet, von Holzhausen said.

Musk blasts public markets, says indexing has 'gone too far'

NEW YORK (Agencies): Elon Musk is lashing out at the state of US financial markets. In a wide-ranging talk with ARK Investment Management's Cathie Wood Thursday, he bemoaned the high regulatory burden faced by publicly traded companies, the pressure from shareholders that limits efficiency, and how passive investing is stoking volatility. The complaints add to a litany of grievances Musk has raised over the years about the tradeoffs of tapping public markets to build some of his many ventures. His disdain for the rigid-



ity of US securities laws has sometimes led to trouble with regulators, including a high-profile fight with watchdogs over tweets about Tesla Inc. Musk is also the chief executive of SpaceX, one of the world's most valuable closely held companies. "There's a lot of pressure, like im-

mense pressure on a public company to not have a bad quarter. So this can actually result in a less efficient operation where you're going to great lengths at the end of the quarter to not disappoint people," Musk said in a Spaces discussion streamed live on the social-media platform X. The "time horizons do not match between investors versus a company's long-term vision." Musk has tangled in the past with the Securities and Exchange Commission, which he dubbed the "Shortseller Enrichment Commission" in 2018.

Apple can't repair older out-of-warranty watches during ban

CUPERTINO (Agencies): Apple customer service teams were informed in a company memo this week that it will no longer replace out-of-warranty models going back to Apple Watch Series 6, Bloomberg News reported on Thursday. The iPhone maker is in the midst of a patent dispute related to a technology used in newer models of its watch. Apple said on Monday it would pause sales of its Series 9 and Ultra 2 smartwatches in the US



from this week, in relation to the patent dispute over the technology that enables the blood oxygen feature on the devices. If a customer has a broken screen, for instance, they won't

be able to get the issue fixed by Apple, Bloomberg News said, adding that the company will still offer help that can be done via software, such as reinstalling the operating system. Company representatives were told to inform affected customers that they will be contacted when hardware replacements are allowed again, according to the report. Apple did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Sony PlayStation 5 sales cross 50 million units

TOKYO (Agencies): Sales of Sony's PlayStation 5 have crossed 50 million units, the Japanese electronics giant said, pointing to "strong momentum" this year for its flagship gaming console. The PS5 was launched in November 2020, with the world in the grip of the Covid pandemic, and its sales initially suffered because of widespread supply chain problems



and a global chip shortage. Still, the PS5 reached the 50-million-unit milestone in almost the same period

as its predecessor, the PS4, with Sony saying its flagship console enjoyed "strong momentum" in 2023. "We're thrilled that this is the first holiday season since launch that we have a full supply of PS5 consoles — so anyone who wants to get one can get one," Jim Ryan, president and CEO of Sony Interactive Entertainment, said in a statement Wednesday.

BMW, Tesla, other used EVs are proving tough to sell

CALIFORNIA (Agencies): The shift away from cars with dirty combustion engines is running into a new hurdle: Drivers don't want to buy used electric vehicles, and that's undermining the market for new ones, too. In the US\$1.2 trillion secondhand market, prices for battery-powered cars are falling faster than for their combustion-engine cousins. Buyers are shunning them due to a lack of subsidies, a desire to wait for better technology and continued shortfalls in charging infrastructures. A fierce price war sparked by Tesla Inc and competitive Chinese models are further depressing values of new and used cars alike, threatening earnings at rivals like Volkswagen AG and Stellantis NV. Because most new vehicles in Europe are sold via leases,



automakers and dealers who finance these transactions are trying to recover losses from plummeting valuations by raising borrowing costs. That's hitting demand in some European markets that were in the vanguard of the shift away from fossil fuel-powered propulsion. Some of the biggest buyers of new cars, including rental firms, are cutting back on EV adoption because they're losing money on resales, with Sixt SE dropping Tesla models from its fleet.

Tencent, NetEase plunge after China's latest online gaming curbs

BEIJING (Agencies): Chinese regulators will curb excessive spending and rewards that encourage online gaming, laying down the latest tightening measures for the world's biggest mobile games arena. Tencent Holdings Ltd slid as much as 6.7% while smaller rival NetEase Inc dived 10% after regulators published new draft regulations online that also warned developers to store all data locally and avoid revealing state secrets in their content. Beijing in recent years has sought to combat gaming addiction, blaming online entertainment for the rise of myopia among youths. The government now wants to discourage high spending within online



titles and will ban the use of rewards to encourage gamers to log on regularly, the National Press and Publication Administration said in draft rules on its website. At the height of the tech crackdown, China's government froze approvals for new titles and launched several investigations into content, forcing developers to modify certain games.

Counterfeit Novo diabetes drug floods US supply chain

NEW YORK (Agencies): The US Food and Drug Administration on Thursday warned consumers not to use counterfeit versions of Novo Nordisk's diabetes drug Ozempic that have been found in the country's drug supply chain. The health regulator said it will continue to investigate counterfeit Ozempic 1 milligram injections and has seized thousands of units, but flagged that some may still be available for purchase. Danish drugmaker Novo Nordisk and the FDA are testing the seized products and do not yet have information about the drugs' identity, quality or safety, the agency said. Novo said the seizures took place in warehouses outside the company's



authorised supply chain. The agency said the needles from the seized injections are counterfeit and their sterility cannot be confirmed, which presents an additional risk of infection for patients. Other confirmed counterfeit components from the seized products include the pen label and accompanying information about the healthcare professional and patient as well as the carton.

Japan's inflation slows to 2.5% in November as energy bills drop

TOKYO (Agencies): Japanese consumer inflation slowed to 2.5% year-on-year in November, down from 2.9% the previous month, as electricity and gas bills declined, government data showed Friday. The figure for the world's third-largest economy, which excludes volatile fresh food prices, was in line with market expectations in a Bloomberg survey. It is the lowest increase in prices since July 2022, as electricity and gas bills declined while the cost of accommodation and telecommunications rose, according

to the internal affairs ministry. The data comes after the Bank of Japan (BOJ) earlier this week maintained its long-standing, ultra-loose monetary policy and offered no guidance on its plans for the new year, sending the yen down against the dollar and boosting stocks. Inflation slowed "as prices of (processed) food soared the previous year, while price increases (for November) have somewhat settled down," chief economist Yoshiki Shinke of Dai-ichi Life Research Institute told AFP.

Dollar sinks to 4-month low ahead of US inflation test

SINGAPORE (Agencies): The dollar languished near a more than four-month low on Friday ahead of a reading on a key US inflation gauge due later in the day, which will provide further clarity on how much room the Federal Reserve has to cut interest rates next year. The greenback hit a five-month trough against the New Zealand dollar and a three-week low against the euro in early Asia trade, resuming its decline after a sudden bout

of risk aversion in New York hours on Wednesday led to a selloff in US stocks and a rise in the dollar. The kiwi was last 0.03% higher at US\$0.6296 after hitting a session high of US\$0.6298, while the euro peaked at US\$1.10125. Focus now turns to Friday's US core personal consumption expenditures (PCE) print — the Fed's preferred measure of underlying inflation — for clues on how far inflation in the world's largest economy is slowing.

Asian stocks see slim weekly gain, await US inflation

SINGAPORE (Agencies): Asian stocks were poised to eke out gains for the final full trading week of the year on Friday, while the dollar eyed a loss as investors look to 2024 as a year of steep US rate cuts. MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan went up 0.3% in early trade. For the week the index is very marginally higher. Banking shares helped Japan's Nikkei rise 0.2%. The

euro poked above US\$1.10. Markets have been in a festive mood for weeks as inflation data around the world has showed a slowdown and the Federal Reserve signalled it was done raising interest rates. Two-year US Treasury yields are down almost 38 basis points in a week and a half and fell 2 bps overnight when third-quarter US core PCE inflation was revised down to 2%.

Liverpool host Arsenal in battle for Premier League Christmas No. 1

LONDON (Agencies): Liverpool and Arsenal will battle for the Christmas No. 1 spot when they meet on Saturday, each with a golden chance to open up a significant lead over absent champions Manchester City. If there is not a winner at Anfield, third-placed Aston Villa could be top at Christmas for the first time since 1999 should their phenomenal home form continue against bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United. The festive Premier League program also features Manchester United's trip to West Ham and in-form Everton's



visit to fifth-placed Tottenham. Here are the three talking points ahead of the weekend action. Arsenal sit top of the Premier League table with 39 points from 17 matches, one ahead of Liverpool and five clear of Man-

chester City, who are on Club World Cup duty in Saudi Arabia. The defending champions' run of one win in six games prior to heading to the Gulf has opened the door to a fascinating title race. If the Gunners win at Anfield, Pep Guardiola's men, currently in fourth spot, would find themselves eight points adrift by the time they return to top-flight action at Everton on Dec. 27. Last year City put on the afterburners to chase down long-time leaders Arsenal, eventually overhauling them to win a third straight Premier League title.

In Saudi Arabia's stellar soccer year, federation boss sees 2034 World Cup fueling more rapid change

JEDDAH (Agencies): Saudi Arabia's ambitions in soccer were made stunning and clear in 2023, and its upcoming 11-year journey toward hosting the men's World Cup promises much more of the same. In an interview Thursday with The Associated Press, Saudi Arabian Football Federation President Yasser Al-Mishehal said sport and society in the Kingdom are going through transformational changes ahead of staging soccer's biggest event in 2034. "We are trying to do everything for our people, for our economy and also we want to host as many people from all



different places in the world," Al-Mishehal said. Soccer has taken a prominent place in the Vision 2030 plan launched in 2016 to modernize the Saudi economy and society for a future beyond the oil production that fuels its wealth.

The program was driven from its start by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The Saudis' statement year in soccer started with hiring of Cristiano Ronaldo to a Saudi club and is ending with the current best team, Manchester City, playing for a title in Jeddah. The Club World Cup final Friday closes the first FIFA tournament played in Saudi Arabia this century, and just weeks after the biggest hosting prize was all-but guaranteed. FIFA fast-tracked finding a host for the 2034 World Cup in October and within days there was only one candidate.

Thiem, Raducanu headline Aussie Open qualifying field

LONDON (Agencies): Former US Open champions Dominic Thiem and Emma Raducanu will headline the qualifying field for the Australian Open as they look to reignite their careers in 2024 following struggles with injuries. Thiem broke the Grand Slam stranglehold of Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic by winning the 2020 US Open but a wrist injury the following year sidelined him for months, while a series of other fitness issues saw his ranking slide to No 352. The 30-year-old Austrian, now ranked 98th, won his



first match at a Grand Slam since 2021 in New York in August before crashing out in the second round. Thiem, who made the Melbourne Park final in 2020, can still gain direct entry into the main

draw of the tournament if one player pulls out. Raducanu missed out on an Australian Open wildcard and will now have to take a similar path as her run 2021 Flushing Meadows run when she became the first player in the Open Era to win a Major after beginning in the qualifying rounds. The 21-year-old Briton, who is now ranked No 299, will gear up for the first Grand Slam of the year by playing at the Auckland Classic having fought her way back to fitness following operations on both wrists and an ankle in May.

Chelsea captain James undergoes surgery to resolve hamstring issue

LONDON (Agencies): Chelsea captain Reece James said he had undergone surgery to resolve a recurring hamstring issue. The 24-year-old England right-back missed seven Premier League matches earlier in the season with a hamstring injury and sustained a similar issue during Chelsea's 2-0 defeat at Everton this month. "The footballing world



knew I got injured, but the proce-

dure I would go down this time took slightly longer to figure out the best solution," James said on Instagram yesterday. "I had surgery today to try fix my recurring hamstring issue, the recovery has started, both physically and mentally." Chelsea, who are 10th in the Premier League, next visit Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday.

NSC to revise allowances for para badminton coaches, players

KUALA LUMPUR (Agencies): The National Sports Council (NSC) will revise the allowances for para badminton coaches and players under the podium programme based on their international achievements this year, according to the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM). BAM human resources and administration department head R Ravendran said among the international competitions that would be considered are the 2023 Asean Para Games in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in June and the 2022 Asian Para Games in



Hangzhou, China, in October. "Among the matters discussed in the sports working committee meeting were the revised allowances for three coaches and seven athletes under the podium

programme. "The details are with the NSC, which will discuss with relevant parties to streamline the matter as there are many categories of past achievements and tournaments to be considered," he told reporters after the meeting at the NSC here today. On another matter, Ravendran said SU5 (physical impairment) singles player Fareez Anuar can still represent the country at the 2024 Paris Paralympics if he finishes on the podium in the 2024 World Para Badminton Championships in Pattaya, Thailand, in February.

Retired rugby great Alun Wyn Jones reveals heart condition

LONDON (Agencies): Retired Wales rugby great Alun Wyn Jones has revealed he was diagnosed with a heart condition towards the end of his career and has called for better screening for players. The 38-year-old, rugby's most-capped international, told the Telegraph he was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation while he was at French Top 14 side Toulon. The ex-Wales and British and Irish Lions forward's career ended at the French side last month. He played a total of 170 internationals. Atrial fibrillation is a heart condition



that causes an irregular and often abnormally fast heart rate. "It was discovered when I underwent a full medical check, which included an ECG test when I joined Toulon in July on a

short-term contract as cover during the World Cup," he said. "The cardiac doctor picked it up straight away. My heart-beat was like a galloping horse with six legs. It was all over the shop." Warren Gatland named Jones in his preliminary Wales squad for the 2023 Rugby World Cup in France, held in September and October, but he opted to retire from internationals in May. Jones said it was vital to boost screening. "There is a lot of talk about welfare in rugby at the minute but does that cover everything?" he said.

Harassment case involving coach closed due to conflicting statements

PETALING JAYA (Agencies): Police investigations into a sexual harassment allegation involving a national mountain bike coach and a female national rider were closed due to discrepancies in statements. "The investigation papers have been reviewed and they were marked as 'No Further Action' (NFA) by the investigating officer due to discrepancies in statements given by the victim and a witness," Putrajaya police chief Asmadi Abdul Aziz told FMT. Yesterday, Amarjit Singh, the acting deputy president of the Malaysian National Cycling



Federation (MNCF), said the MNCF will convene an in-house disciplinary hearing concerning the coach. Amarjit said the coach, rider and witnesses will be called to attend the hearing. His state-

ment followed reports that the deputy public prosecutor's office had decided not to press any charges against the coach following a police investigation. The DPP's decision followed a Nov 23 letter on the investigation by Asmadi. The controversy started in April when the female national mountain bike rider filed a police report following an incident during a training session, after which the MNCF suspended the coach. The coach, who had been training the squad for the Phnom Penh Sea Games, resigned following the rider's allegation.

Ajax lose to amateur team in Dutch Cup to continue tumultuous season

UTRECHT (Agencies): Dutch soccer giant Ajax lost to an amateur team in the KNVB Cup for the first time in their illustrious history on Thursday. Ajax were beaten 3-2 by USV Hercules, which play in the fourth tier of Dutch soccer. "This should not have happened," Ajax assistant coach Michael Valkanis said after the second-round game in Utrecht. It continues a tumultuous season for Ajax, which are in fifth place in the Eredivisie after their worst start to a campaign since the advent of professional soccer in the Netherlands in 1954. The



four-time European champions went 10 matches without a win at one stage, their longest-ever run without a victory. "We are having a very difficult season," Valkanis said. "But we have to continue and get everything on track."

All systems go for Dakar Rally 2024



JEDDAH (Agencies): Dakar Rally 2024 Saudi Arabia is nearing its highly anticipated start, with preparations entering their concluding phase. Dakar Rally, recognized as the world's biggest challenge in motorsports and the most challenging rally on the planet, is slated to begin in 15 days. The Kingdom will serve as the sole host from Jan. 5-19, for the fifth consecutive year. Recently, there have been dedicated efforts to maintain the momentum of advanced preparations, ensuring that all logistical aspects are addressed to unveil an updated version of the prestigious ral-

ly and to demonstrate the Kingdom's adeptness and potential to organize major international events. Efforts are underway to apply the final touches to the course and fit it with the necessary technical equipment for timing measurements, checkpoint inspections, and the construction of the temporary bivouac accommodation camps in the early stages hosted by AIUla. The 46th edition of the world's most formidable rally attracts 778 participants representing 72 countries from around the globe, with France having the highest representation of participants at 163, followed by Spain with 119, and Italy with 72 across all categories of the rally. There are 135 newcomers competing in the race for the first time, along with 129 legends and 31 participants in the Original by Motul category. Additionally, 46 women are participating, 34 of whom are in the Dakar Classic category.

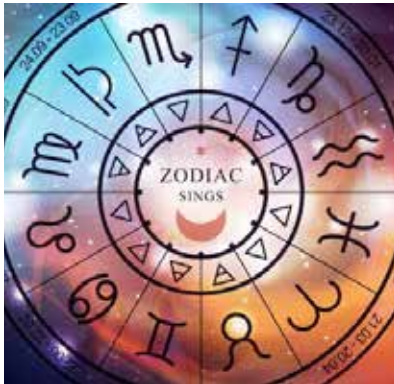
Fifa reports US\$2.79bil investment in football development from 2016-22

ZURICH (Agencies): Fifa provided US\$2.79 billion to its member associations and confederations for investment in football development over the first two cycles of its Forward Development Programme, the world governing body said in a report today. Two iterations of the programme – a three-year and four-year cycle – have been completed since it was launched in May 2016, with Fifa committing money to a diverse array of local projects. "With the third cycle of the Fifa Forward Development Programme now underway, we have the perfect opportunity to reflect on the programme's achievements since its launch in 2016," Fifa's president Gianni Infantino said. "From the very start, we pledged that revenues generated by football would be used for the benefit of our sport all around the world; for girls



and boys, for women and men, and we have been as good as our word." In the period up to and including 2022, around 80% of the funds – US\$2.24 billion – went to Fifa's 211 member associations, with the remainder going to the confederations and regional associations, the report said. The associations spent the funds on building new or maintaining existing infrastructure, developing domestic competitions, and covering running costs related to administration and governance.

DAILY HOROSCOPE: DECEMBER 23, 2023



– It's a general reading which may differ from person to person because of time date and year.
– **ARIES**: You are moving quicker and quicker through your tasks today -- you may even run out! It's a good time to take on new projects or to offer assistance where it is most needed. Score a few points!
– **TAURUS**: You're not feeling especially timid right now and are almost certainly on a tear! You might even find a new way to surprise your friends when you step up and say something outrageous!
– **GEMINI**: You're feeling pretty great right now and it's easy for you to show lots of people -- even strangers -- a good time. Parties are perfect for your energy, but you could also do well in speed dating or just work meetings.
– **CANCER**: Listen up -- you've got a lot going on inside your mind! It's a good time to sit still and listen to what you're really trying to tell yourself. The message may be quite surprising and you're not easily surprised!
– **LEO**: Join up with someone who shares at least some of your beliefs and passions -- you've got to get where you're going as part of a group

(at least for now). If you're already hooked up, you're golden.
– **VIRGO**: Take a second look at the details of your budget or your big plans -- you are almost sure to spot a couple of little mistakes. Anyone could make them, but only someone like you could catch them!
– **LIBRA**: You are ready to talk about something really big -- even if it doesn't quite seem like it. Your great energy is perfect for communicating deep feelings to almost anyone who's willing to listen.
– **SCORPIO**: You're in charge of more money than usual, thanks to either an unexpected bonus or -- more likely -- a pool that needs to go to a large purchase. The responsibility feels remarkably natural!
– **SAGITTARIUS**: If things start to slow down, no matter where you are, you need to do something to keep busy. Slowing down, even for a few minutes, is a sure way to slide into sleepiness or just major boredom.
– **CAPRICORN**: Show your coworkers, customers or family members how much they mean to you today by going above and beyond. You can score massive bonus points just by adding a little extra to your ordinary service.
– **ACQUARIUS**: You come up with a unique idea that gets lots of people talking -- maybe too many? It could be that it's a little premature, as your best ideas are almost always ahead of their time.
– **PISCES**: Take a second, third or fourth look at that thing (or person) that's been puzzling you. It's one of those days when illusions seem a little less real, so you're more likely to get at the truth.

South Africa may prosecute and revoke citizenship of citizens in Israeli army

CAPE TOWN (Agencies): The South African government has warned its citizens who are fighting in the Israel Defence Forces against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip that they may face prosecution and have their citizenship revoked. President Cyril Ramaphosa, meanwhile, has once again condemned the Israeli attack on Gaza, describing it as genocide. "The South African Government is gravely concerned by reports that some South African citizens and permanent residents have joined or are considering joining the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in the war in Gaza and in the other Occupied Palestinian Territories," said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria on Monday. "Such action can potentially contribute to the violation of international law and the commission of further international crimes, thus making them liable for



prosecution in South Africa." The authorities, stressed the ministry, are monitoring such citizens. "The South African Citizenship Act, 1995 (Act No. 88 of 1995) provides that any person who obtained South African citizenship by naturalisation in terms of that Act shall cease to be a South African citizen if he or she engages under the flag of another country in a war that the Republic does not support or agree with," added the ministry. Moreover, Ramaphosa has called on the International Criminal Court to conduct an immediate investi-

gation into the war crimes committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip. He told journalists on Monday that South Africa has submitted the necessary documents to the ICC regarding Israeli war crimes, and that it is waiting for the court to take action regarding the investigation. The ICC, he pointed out, has the authority to indict those responsible for war crimes committed in Palestine. As of yesterday, Israel had killed 19,453 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since 7 October, most of them children and women. More than 51,000 have been wounded, and at least 8,000 remain missing under the rubble of the civilian infrastructure destroyed by the apartheid state. The occupied Palestinian territory has been under Israeli siege for more than 16 years, and is in the grip of an "unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe," say Palestinian and UN sources.

'Captain America' Arrested at US Military Base for Armed Entry Attempt



FLORIDA (Agencies): In a bizarre incident, a Florida man, identifying himself as "Captain America," was arrested while attempting to enter MacDill Air Force Base armed with claims to possess "top secret information." The suspect, Baruch Roche II, exhibited signs of extreme paranoia and psychosis during the encounter, according to a published criminal complaint. In early November, Roche drove to the front gate of the Air Force base in Tampa, Florida, asserting that he was an active member of the United States Southern Command (SO-COM). He insisted on having a meeting with a "SOCOM general" to provide supposed "top secret information." Denied access, Roche became argumentative, threatening to return daily and confront the officers who denied him entry. Air Force personnel subsequently placed Roche in handcuffs and discovered an AR-15-style rifle along with approximately 125 rounds of ammunition in the trunk of his car. A military identification card naming him as a retired Air Force veteran was also found. Due to his mental state, Roche was involuntarily hospitalized. Charged with attempting to bring a firearm onto a federal facility, Roche could face up to a year in prison if convicted. His weapon and ammunition were seized by the state. The incident occurred less than two weeks after Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey was placed on lockdown due to reports of an active shooter.

Argentina Unveils Sweeping Economic Reforms in "Shock Therapy" Response to Crisis



BUENOS AIRES (Agencies): Argentine President Javier Milei has unveiled an extensive package of economic reforms, including the privatization of state-owned companies and the elimination of export limits and price controls, as part of his "economic shock therapy" approach to address the country's severe economic crisis. Milei, a self-described anarcho-capitalist, signed a decree outlining over 300 measures aimed at deregulating the economy and fostering economic growth. The reforms encompass various sectors, including labor law, tourism, satellite internet services, pharmaceuticals, wine production, and foreign trade. The announcement comes in the wake of a 54% devaluation of the peso and other austerity measures by the new government. The reforms, however, have faced criticism, with protests in Buenos Aires expressing discontent and demanding more support for the poor.

Shooting Leaves 15 Dead, Dozens Injured at Prague's Charles University

PRAGUE (Agencies): In a devastating attack at Charles University in Prague on Thursday, a gunman claimed the lives of 15 individuals and left around two dozen others injured, according to Czech police reports. The assailant, identified as a student at the university, was neutralized at the scene. Police swiftly responded to the incident at Jan Palach Square in central Prague, where they dealt with an active shooter, as stated by Police President Martin Vondrasek during a press briefing. Amid the evacuation process, authorities discovered 15 victims deceased, with at least 24 others sustaining injuries, as confirmed by Vondrasek. While Czech media identified the shooter as 24-year-old David Kozak, a student at the univer-



sity, Police President Vondrasek emphasized that the attacker had not yet been officially named. Additionally, he noted uncertainty regarding the source of the fatal shot that ended the assailant's life and halted the violent episode. The perpetrator is suspected of committing patricide in the city of Kladno earlier on Thursday before making his way to Prague, added Vondrasek.

Ireland Initiates Human Rights Case Against UK Over Northern Ireland Legacy Act



DUBLIN (Agencies): Dublin has decided to pursue legal action against the UK over the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act, which potentially provides immunity for crimes committed during the conflict in Northern Ireland. Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar announced the inter-state case, stating it would be taken to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. The controversial law, in force since September, assigns investigations of historical cases to the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery, potentially granting immunity to perpetrators who testify. Deputy Prime

Minister Micheal Martin expressed concerns that the act may hinder existing avenues for truth and justice in historic cases, impacting inquests, police investigations, ombudsman investigations, and civil actions. The legislation, opposed by many in Northern Ireland, has faced criticism from human rights groups and victims of the conflict. UK Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Chris Heaton-Harris called Ireland's legal action unnecessary, asserting the act aims to facilitate victims and survivors in obtaining information more efficiently. The Troubles in Northern Ireland, a violent conflict between unionists and nationalists, resulted in over 3,600 deaths and tens of thousands of injuries. Amnesty International welcomed Dublin's decision, criticizing the act for potentially shielding perpetrators of human rights violations. The conflict involved cases of collusion and wrongful imprisonment, and the Legacy Act has faced rejection from various quarters.

New variant of COVID-19 cases on rise

NEWYORK (Agencies): A new version of the Omicron coronavirus, called "JN.1," has caught the attention of global health experts. Although it's classified as a "variant of interest" by the World Health Organization (WHO), the current risk to the public is deemed low. JN.1 has been detected in several countries, with notable increases in the US and the UK. As winter approaches, the WHO warns of potential rises in COVID-19 and other respiratory infections like the flu and RSV. While the virus evolves, with Omicron being predominant, WHO is closely monitoring variants, including JN.1. Despite being the fastest-growing variant in the US and the UK, no major concerns have been raised. JN.1 has an additional spike protein mutation compared to its



predecessor, potentially contributing to its rapid spread. The impact on vaccine immunity remains unclear, and more research is needed. WHO advises precautionary measures such as wearing masks, practicing good hygiene, and staying updated on vaccinations. People are urged to stay home if unwell and get tested for COVID-19 symptoms. Monitoring data and taking appropriate measures are crucial to controlling the virus's spread.

France closes Niger embassy after row with military junta

PARIS (Agencies): France is closing its embassy in Niger indefinitely as tensions between the two countries escalate. The embassy says it is "no longer able to function normally or fulfil its missions" due to restrictions imposed by Niger's military government. Local embassy staff have also been dismissed, former French ambassador Sylvain Itté said in a letter. Niger's relationship with France has soured since the military toppled President Mohamed Bazoum in



July. In September, Mr Itté and several French staff left the country, a month after the military regime ordered the ambassador's exit and set up a blockade around the embassy premises in the capital, Niamey.

Amsterdam Plans to Relocate Red Light District Amid Controversy

AMSTERDAM (Agencies): Amsterdam officials have unveiled a proposal to move the city's notorious 'red light district' to a purpose-built 'Erotic Center' in the southern part of the city. The initiative aims to shed the area's debauched image, reduce crime, and alleviate the impact of tourism. Mayor Femke Halsema identified Europa Boulevard as the prime location for the new Erotic Center, which is expected to have 100 rooms for sex workers. Halsema, a vocal critic of the historic red light district known as De Wallen, where sex workers stand in neon-lit windows, stated that the proposal would be presented to the city council early next year, with the center anticipated to open in seven years. Europa Boulevard, near Amsterdam's business district, was chosen from three proposed sites. While prostitution is legal in Amsterdam, it is limited to specific locations with permits. The red light district currently has approximately 250 active



windows. The Erotic Center's windows will be located exclusively inside the building, aiming to combat sightseeing tourism and deter disruptive groups. This move aligns with broader efforts to reshape Amsterdam's image as a European 'party capital.' However, the plan has faced criticism from sex workers, residents, and businesses near the proposed center. Critics argue that punishing sex workers for issues related to crowds in De Wallen is unfair. Some view the proposal as a form of gentrification, and the European Medicines Agency expressed concern about the safety of its staff near the new location.

Spain Blocks EU From Joining US-Led Operation Against Houthis in Red Sea - Reports



MOSCOW (Agencies): Spain has blocked the European Union's participation in the US-led operation in the Red Sea aimed at protecting commercial vessels from Yemeni Houthis, Spanish newspaper El Confidencial reported. Spain vetoed the EU's participation in the Operation Prosperity Guardian despite the government's advocating for whole Europe to join the mission several hours before, the newspaper reported. Spain has not explained the u-turn on the policy to the partners, the newspaper reported on Thursday. On Monday, the US launched an international operation aimed at protecting commercial ships in the Red Sea from the attacks of Yemen's Ansar Allah rebel movement, also known as the Houthis. On Thursday, Pentagon spokesman Patrick Ryder said that more than 20 countries had so far signed on to participate in the coalition. The Houthi rebels vowed they will continue to prevent the passage in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea of ships linked to Israeli companies or bound for Israel until the latter's military actions in the Gaza Strip end.

Chatty robot helps seniors fight loneliness through AI companionship



CORAL SPRINGS, Fla. (Agencies): Joyce Loaiza lives alone, but when she returns to her apartment at a Florida senior community, the retired office worker often has a chat with a friendly female voice that asks about her day. A few miles away, the same voice comforted 83-year-old Deanna Dezern when her friend died. In central New York, it plays games and music for 92-year-old Marie Broadbent, who is blind and in hospice, and in Washington state, it helps 83-year-old Jan Worrell make new friends. The women are some of the first in the country to receive the robot ElliQ, whose creators, Intuition Robotics, and senior assistance officials say is the only device using artificial intelligence specifically designed to alleviate the loneliness and isolation experienced by many older Americans. "It's entertaining. You can actually talk to her," said Loaiza, 81, whose ElliQ in suburban Fort Lauderdale nicknamed her "Jellybean" for no particular reason. "She'll make comments like, 'I would go outside if I had hands, but I can't hold an umbrella.'" The device, which looks like a small table lamp, has an eyeless, mouthless head that lights up and swivels. It remembers each user's interests and their conversations, helping tailor future chats, which can be as deep as the meaning of life or as light as the horoscope.

Japan to send Patriot missiles to US which may aid Ukraine

TOKYO (Agencies): Japan says it will send Patriot air defence missiles to the US after changing its arms export rules, in a significant shift away from its pacifist policies. The move could free up the US to send its own stockpile to Ukraine. Western powers have been running out of ammunition to supply Ukraine in its defence against Russia's invasion. Patriot missiles are among the most advanced weapons supplied by the US to Ukraine. Tokyo previously only allowed for components of licensed equipment to be sent from Japan to the nation where the manufacturing licence originated. But under the new rules it can ship finished goods too. Shortly after the government announced this change on Friday, the foreign ministry said it would ship Patriot missiles to the US to "further strengthen the Japan-US alliance". It added that the missiles could only be sent to the US, and would require Japan's approval to be sent to a third country. Japan still bans the export of weapons to countries at war. This could mean that Japan-made Patriot missiles may replenish the US' stockpile, while Washington sends US-made ones to Ukraine. In Japan, the Patriot missiles are manufactured by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries under licence from US defence contractors Lockheed Martin and RTX.

Ambassador Amna Baloch, Spanish envoy discuss ties



BRUSSELS (Agencies): Pakistan's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union Amna Baloch here on Friday met the Permanent Representative of Spain to the European Union Marcos Alonso. During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on areas of bilateral interest. They agreed to continue dialogue to enhance cooperation and strengthen the partnership between Pakistan and Spain in all domains.

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