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Editor: Omer Rizwan

US allies reluctant on Red Sea task force

WASHINGTON (Agencies): U.S. President Joe Biden hoped to present a firm international response to Yemen's Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping by launching a new maritime force, but a week after its launch many allies don't want to be associated with it, publicly, or at all. Two of America's European allies who were listed as contributors to Operation Prosperity Guardian - Italy and Spain - issued statements appearing to distance themselves from the maritime force. The Pentagon says the force is a defensive coalition of more than 20 nations to ensure billions of dollars' worth of commerce can flow freely through a vital shipping chokepoint in Red Sea waters off Yemen. But nearly half of those countries have so far not come forward to acknowledge their contributions or allowed the U.S. to do so. Those contributions can range from dispatching warships to merely sending a staff officer. The reluctance of some U.S. allies to link themselves to the effort partly reflects the fissures created by the conflict in Gaza, which has seen Biden maintain firm support for Israel even as international criticism rises over its offensive, which Gaza's health ministry says has killed more than 21,000 Palestinians. "European governments are very worried that part of their po-



tential electorate will turn against them," said David Hernandez, a professor of international relations at the Complutense University of Madrid, noting that the European public is increasingly critical of Israel and wary of being drawn into a conflict. The Iran-backed Houthis have attacked or seized a dozen ships with missiles and drones since Nov. 19, trying to inflict an international cost over Israel's campaign, which followed the Oct. 7 rampage in southern Israel by Hamas militants that killed 1,200 people and took 240 hostage. The navies of the United States, Britain and France have each shot down Houthi-launched drones or missiles. A person familiar with Biden administration thinking said

the U.S. believes escalating Houthi attacks call for an international response separate from the conflict raging in Gaza. The Rea Sea is the entry point for ships using the Suez Canal, which handles about 12% of worldwide trade and is vital for the movement of goods between Asia and Europe. Houthi attacks have seen some ships rerouted around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, substantially increasing sailing time and costs. Denmark's giant container firm Maersk said on Saturday it would resume shipping operations in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. But Germany's Hapag Lloyd said on Wednesday it still believes the Red Sea is too dangerous and will continue to send ships around the Cape of Good Hope.

US approves \$250m in military aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON (Agencies): The White House has approved another tranche of US military aid to Ukraine worth some \$250m (£195m). The latest package includes air defence, artillery and small arms ammunition, and anti-tank weapons, US officials say. But it marks the last funding available without fresh approval from Congress, where talks have stalled. Ukraine has warned that the war effort and its public finances are at risk if further Western aid is not forthcoming. Amid a stalled counter-offensive in the east of the country and a little-changed line of control, Ukrainian officials are facing the prospect of a slowdown in aid from allies in Washington and Europe. Although the Ukraine war effort has broad support in the US Congress, an agreement on further arms has been stopped by Republicans who insist that tougher security measures on the US-Mexico border must be part of any military aid deal. An emergency spending measure that would have provided \$50bn for Ukraine and \$14bn for Israel was defeated in the Senate earlier this month, with every Republican voting against it - along with Bernie Sanders, an independent who usually votes with Democrats but has expressed concerns about Israel's war against Hamas. A subsequent visit by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy failed to sway lawmakers. Wednesday's announcement will see the weapons pulled from existing Pentagon stocks, a move which does not need Congressional approval. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement announcing the aid package that it was "imperative that Congress act swiftly, as soon as possible, to advance our national security interests by helping Ukraine defend itself and secure its future". "Our assistance has been critical to supporting our Ukrainian partners as they defend their country and their freedom against Russia's aggression," he added. Earlier this month a €50bn EU aid package for Ukraine was blocked by Hungary.

Hamas, other Resistance factions fired 12,000 rockets into 'Israel'

GAZA CITY (Agencies): Since October 7, Hamas and other Resistance factions continue to fire rockets at "Israel" nearly every day, aiming deep inside the occupied territories. Hamas, alongside other Resistance factions, persists in launching rockets at "Israel", targeting major settlements, The New York Times reported. Since October 7, approximately 12,000 rockets have been fired from Gaza into "Israel", with a quarter of them on the mentioned date, as reported by the Israeli occupation's government. It is also clear that the ongoing attacks demonstrate the extent of Hamas' arsenal and its ability to threaten areas far from Gaza, it added. While rocket attacks have been a longstanding concern in southern "Israel" along the Gaza border, the war has made air raid sirens a common experience for Israelis across the occupied territories, as per the report. In

the past few weeks, alarm sirens have been activated in central cities of "Israel", including "Tel Aviv" and occupied al-Quds. On December 8, al-Qassam Brigades released video footage unveiling a new Multiple Rocket Launcher (MLR), LM-90, which holds up to eight rockets at a time. The footage entitled "Tel Aviv will be burnt to the ground, al-Quds will be liberated," showcases yet another milestone for the Palestinian Resistance, both in terms of production capabilities and its military arsenal. A placard displayed in the video, as Resistance fighters arm the system, shows a designed photo of martyr Ibrahim al-Makadmeh, one of Hamas' founders and a prominent Palestinian figure. The placard also revealed that the rocket was named after al-Makadmeh, making this at least the second rocket to be named after the late leader.

India, Russia ink deal for new nuclear power generation units



- The two governments have signed an agreement for additional units for the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant
MOSCOW (Agencies): During an address in Moscow on Tuesday, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced a new agreement between India and Russia for the construction of additional units at the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) in Tamil Nadu. The existing joint project includes operational units 1 and 2 with a capacity of 1000 MW each, while the four remaining units of the same capacity are currently under construction.

They are set to be completed by 2027, resulting in a total capacity of 6000 MW. "Today, we signed some important agreements pertaining to future units of the Kudankulam Nuclear Project," the minister said. In his speech, he called Russia a "special partner" in several domains, such as defense, nuclear power, and space. "Collaborations are done... with countries with which you have a high degree of trust," he added. Additionally, Jaishankar disclosed that face-to-face discussions on the free trade agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Zone are set to commence early next year. Earlier on Tuesday, Jaishankar, along with Russia's deputy prime minister and minister of industry and trade, Denis Manturov, co-chaired the Intergovernmental Russian-Indian Commission on Trade and Economic, Scientific, Technical, and Cultural Cooperation. These discussions took place at the 'Russia' exposition, a prominent exhibition at Moscow's VDNKH complex.

Pakistan Successfully Tests New Fatah 2 Long-Range Precision Strike Weapon

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Pakistan has conducted a successful test of its new indigenous long-range precision strike weapon, the Fatah 2, featuring an impressive range of approximately 249 miles. The Fatah 2 boasts state-of-the-art avionics, a sophisticated navigation system, and a unique flight trajectory. The test marks a significant advancement over its predecessor, the Fatah 1, which has an 87-mile range. Based on the Chinese Taian TAS5450 eight-wheel drive chassis, the Fatah 2

is a two-round guided multiple launch rocket system. This development underscores Pakistan's commitment to deploying multiple precision strike artillery systems, capable of varying ranges to effectively engage adversary targets. Analysts suggest that the Fatah 2 may target India's S-400 air defense system, demonstrating Pakistan's strategic response based on lessons learned from recent conflicts and the evolving dynamics of modern warfare.

Architect of the Modern EU, Jacques Delors, Passes Away at 98

PARIS (Agencies): Former European Commission President Jacques Delors - described as the architect of the modern EU - has died aged 98, his daughter says. He helped create the single market allowing the free movement of people, goods and services within the bloc. Serving from 1985 to 1995, Delors also laid the groundwork for the single European currency, the euro. But for those sceptical of integration, especially in the UK, he was seen as a symbol of Brussels meddling. A headline by British tabloid The Sun once famously shouted: "Up Yours, Delors." Delors' daughter Martine Aubry said he had died in his sleep on Wednesday morning in his Paris home. French President Emmanuel Macron praised Delors, who also served as French finance minister from 1981-84, as a "statesman with a French destiny" and "inexhaustible craftsman of our Europe". "His commitment, his ideals

and his righteousness will always inspire us," he said. "I salute his work and his memory and share the pain of his loved ones." He served three terms as European Commission president, longer than anyone else. Ursula von der Leyen, who currently holds the post, said he was "a visionary who made our Europe stronger". European Council President Charles Michel described him as a "great Frenchman and a great European" who had "entered history as one of the builders of our Europe". A French Socialist, he was a firm believer in post-war integration. As well as the single market and the euro, his tenure at the top of the EU saw the creation of the Schengen agreement for travel and the Erasmus programme for student exchanges. But for the UK's ruling Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher, moves towards a federal Europe were seen as anathema.

New York Times sues Microsoft and OpenAI for 'billions'

NEW YORK (Agencies): US news organisation the New York Times is suing ChatGPT-owner OpenAI over claims its copyright was infringed to train the system. The lawsuit, which also names Microsoft as a defendant, says the firms should be held responsible for "billions of dollars" in damages. ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs) "learn" by analysing a massive amount of data often sourced online. The BBC has approached OpenAI and Microsoft for comment. The lawsuit claims "millions" of articles published by the New York Times were used without its permission to make ChatGPT smarter, and claims the tool is now competing with the newspaper as a trustworthy information source. It alleges that when asked about current events, ChatGPT will sometimes generate "verbatim excerpts" from New York Times articles, which cannot be accessed without paying for a

subscription. According to the lawsuit, this means readers can get New York Times content without paying for it - meaning it is losing out on subscription revenue as well as advertising clicks from people visiting the website. It also gave the example of the Bing search engine - which has some features powered by ChatGPT - producing results taken from a New York Times-owned website, without linking to the article or including referral links it uses to generate income. Microsoft has invested more than \$10 billion (£7.8 billion) in OpenAI. The lawsuit, filed on Wednesday in a Manhattan federal court, reveals the New York Times unsuccessfully approached Microsoft and OpenAI in April to seek "an amicable resolution" over its copyright. It comes a month after a period of chaos at OpenAI where co-founder and CEO Sam Altman was sacked - and then rehired - over the course of a few days.

Airline puts six-year-old on wrong flight

- The child, who traveled alone, ended up some 160 miles from his intended US destination, Spirit Airlines said
Philadelphia (Agencies): A six-year-old boy flew alone to the wrong US city after he was "incorrectly boarded" on a Spirit Airlines plane. Casper was travelling from Philadelphia to meet his grandmother in Fort Myers, Florida. But he ended up in Orlando - a four-hour drive from Fort Myers - after he was mistakenly put on the wrong plane. Spirit Airlines has apologised and offered to reimburse his grandmother for the drive to pick Casper up. Casper was meant to be travelling from Philadelphia International Airport to Southwest Florida International Airport in Fort Myers on Thursday, to meet his grandmother, Maria Ramos. But in a scene reminiscent of the film Home Alone 2, when Kevin gets on a wrong flight



- leaving him stranded far away from his family at Christmas, Casper was put on a plane to Orlando, which is 160 miles (260km) from Fort Myers. After the plane he was supposed to be on landed and her grandson wasn't on it, panic set in for Ms Ramos. "I ran inside the plane to the flight attendant and I asked her, 'Where's my grandson? He was handed over to you at Philadelphia?'" Ms Ramos told WINK-TV, a television station in Fort Myers. She said the flight attendant told her: "No, I had no kids with me."

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.

Scrutiny of nominations papers continues

PESHAWAR (APP): The scrutiny of nomination papers for the upcoming general elections continued in the province wherein scrutiny of 58 papers for the National Assembly and provincial assembly was completed. According to the spokesman of the provincial election commission so far,

scrutiny of 32 papers has been completed on the specific seats of women in the Provincial Assembly. Similarly, scrutiny of 26 candidates for the National Assembly and minority reserved seats has been completed. He said that 40 candidates were summoned for the seats of the Provincial

Assembly and, 30 for the national and minority seats on Wednesday. He said those candidates who want to change the date of scrutiny would be accommodated adding that due to Christmas the candidates for minority seats were given relaxation in scrutiny on 25th and 26th December

CM encourages students to harness their energies positively

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Justice (Retd) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, on Tuesday, distributed laptops among the students of Hazara University, Mansehra, under the Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme. Addressing the ceremony as the chief guest, he emphasized that promoting education is the government's top priority. The Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme is more than a gift for students, he said. He urged students to utilize their energies positively

and use laptops for education and research purposes. "We need to align the field of higher education with the demands of the modern era," he stated. The chief minister mentioned that the provincial government is taking serious measures to rescue various universities in the province from financial crises. He expressed the need for positive thinking for the betterment of society and highlighted his efforts to contribute to the welfare of the people of the province during his

short tenure. "A lot can be achieved in a short time if the intention is good," emphasized the chief minister. He expressed concern over the unfortunate situation of educated youth facing unemployment. To address youth unemployment, he announced the initiation of a program to send young people abroad for employment. "Under this program, at least five hundred thousand young people will undergo various training courses in different fields within a year," he said.

President SCCI, Secretary industries visit Peshawar Expo Centre

PESHAWAR (APP): Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president, Fuad Ishaq along with Secretary Industries, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Pakistan Expo Centre Private Limited Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mariam Khawar visited the under-construction Peshawar Expo Centre. During the visit, a detailed briefing was given to Fuad Ishaq and apprised him that the structure of Peshawar Expo Centre has been completed while renovation and other construction work on the Expo Centre would be completed in the next 18 months, with the provision of timely funds, said a press release here on Wednesday.

Fuad Ishaq told the secretary Industries government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Pakistan Expo Centre Chief Executive Officer Mariam Khawar that in his previous presidential tenure, the Expo Centre was approved when former Federal minister for commerce Khurram Dastgir visited the chamber house. Initially, a sum of Rs 500 million had been sanctioned out of the total estimated cost of Rs 2.5 billion, in which over Rs 2.4 billion has so far been spent, the SCCI President elaborated. He said owing to the increasing cost of construction materials, an additional Rs 4 billion is required to complete this important project for

which financial assistance would be needed through the Export Development Fund. The SCCI president expressed satisfaction with the design and structure of the Peshawar Expo Centre, which was built at 200 kanals. He, however, voiced concern over the delay in the timely completion of the project. Fuad Ishaq urged the federal minister for commerce Dr Gohar Ejaz to ensure the required Rs 4 billion for Peshawar Expo Centre in the next meeting of the Export Development Fund. It will not only provide a facility to local industries to display their products at the Peshawar Expo centre but also export would be boosted from the province, he added.

700 kg substandard chips, over 100 kg rotten edible items discarded

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority on Wednesday recovered and discarded 700 kg substandard chips and over 100 kg rotten food items in Peshawar and Nowshera. The Food Authority while taking notice of public complaints received in an online public hearing conducted operations in Peshawar and Nowshera, said the spokesperson of Food Authority. A team of the authority conducted raiders on Chips factories located on Charsadda Road here and found use of non-food grade colour and in the preparation of chips. The team confiscated and discarded more than 700 kg of substandard chips. Similarly, during operations

in different markets of Tehsil Pabbi, district Nowshera the teams inspected pop and chips wholesalers, chicken and kebab shops, and chips and spices factories. 800 grams of non-food grade color, 5 kg of mislabeled packing material and 50 kg of substandard garlic were seized from a spices factory. Some 40 kg of sub-standard chicken meat was seized from three chicken shops and discarded, said the spokesman adding that heavy fines were imposed for violation of hygiene rules, while notices for improvement were issued to several businesses. DG Food Authority Shafiullah Khan warned that strict disciplinary action would be taken against the elements involved in adulteration.

Cold, dry weather likely in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Meteorological Department on Wednesday forecast cold and dry during next 24 to 48 hours for most of the districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However there were chances of drizzling, light snowfall in Chitral and surrounding areas and rain with strong cold winds in Swat, Battagram, Mansehra

and Haripur, and hills in the upper areas. There was a possibility of fog in Mardan, Swabi, Charsadda, Nowshera, Peshawar and DI Khan in the morning and night. The minimum temperature recorded during the last 24 hours was Peshawar 8C, Dir and Abbottabad recorded -01, Kalam -04, Saidu Sharif 01 and Chitral zero.

Nomination papers of former MPA Javed Nasim for NA 32 Peshawar accepted

PESHAWAR (APP): The nomination papers of former Member Provincial Assembly (MPA), Javed Nasim Khan for National Assembly (NA-32) constituency Peshawar were accepted by the respective returning officer here on Wednesday. Talking to media persons, he said the resolution of

unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and pollution would be a top priority if voted to power. He said Pakistan was our country and it has all resources if properly utilized can change the destiny of people. Javed Nasim said the nomination papers of his son Wahab Javed for PK-83 were also accepted.

Benazir Bhutto: A champion of democracy, a harbinger of peace remembered on her 16th death anniversary

PESHAWAR (APP): Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, the first woman Prime Minister of the Muslim world and twice premier of Pakistan, was paid rich tributes by political leaders and academia for her great services for democracy and political empowerment of the people on her 16th death anniversary observed with great admiration here on Wednesday. "The sweet memories of charismatic leader Benazir Bhutto, who attained the distinction of being the first elected women Prime Minister of the Muslim world and twice premier of Pakistan, are still alive in the hearts and minds of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who remembered her as true champion of democracy, a role model and harbinger of peace," said Sardar Ali Khan, former senator and PPP leader while talking to APP. Like other provinces, the people, politicians, civil society, lawyers, human rights activists and workers of Pakistan People Party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have paid glowing tributes to Benazir Bhutto Shaheed on her death anniversary observed with great respect and admiration in all districts

of KP. Besides collective prayers, Quran Khwani and condolence references were also held by PPP workers in all districts of KP where speakers paid glowing tributes to her political and democratic services besides sacrifices for the nation. On December 27, 2007, Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a gun and bomb attack after addressing a mammoth election rally at historic Liaquat Bagh Rawalpindi that left the entire nation in an endless mourning and deep shock. Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, 54, was one of the very few international stature personalities, who embraced martyrdom while being surrounded by a sea of supporters outside Liaquat Bagh and immortalized forever. A leader of great quality of head and hearts with a taste of political know-how, Benazir Bhutto had left a luxurious life and came to Pakistan after an exile on October 18, 2007, with an aim to rid the country of dictatorship and put it on path of democracy, peace and development. "Despite severe threats to her life, the daughter of one of Pakistan's most charismatic politicians and former

prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, had followed the rich tradition of her illustrious family and did not flee danger, but instead embraced martyrdom by not bowing to pessimists and dictatorial forces," said Sardar Ali. On October 18, 2007, when she arrived at Karachi from Dubai, hundreds of thousands of her supporters from across Pakistan thronged the port city to welcome her beloved leader. "Even the deadly explosion at Karsaz Karachi's rally where about 140 people were killed and more than 450 wounded could not deter her from political struggle as the celebrated leader knew that only democracy was a remedy to the topsy-turvy setup of the country, elimination of terrorism, solutions of economic and peoples' problems at that time," he said. "Death was meaningless for Benazir Bhutto Shaheed as she came to Pakistan for the socio-economic emancipation of poor and underprivileged, revival of genuine democracy and peace in the country despite severe threats to her life and was immortalized while staying among people outside Liaquat Bagh," said Malik

Azmat, former Minister of State while talking to APP. "BB Shaheed lived for people and died for them," he said, adding Benazir Bhutto always thought about the welfare of 240 million Pakistanis being an international leader and openly condemned terrorism that cost her life." He said Benazir Bhutto was martyred when she tried to restore genuine democracy and peace in Pakistan besides bringing Muslim countries and the West closer. Azmat said the imperialists and inimical forces removed her from the political scene in a bid to destabilize Pakistan and keep people backward. "Benazir Bhutto Shaheed loved Islam from the core of her heart and had a great regard for eastern values and culture. In spite of her education in top universities and colleges of the west and two-times elected former PM, she upheld the eastern traditions and did not deviate from the Islamic teachings," he said. "Benazir Bhutto proved her claim to be the "Daughter of the East" as she always covered her head with her traditional white headscarf and never shook hand with any dignitary, which

spoke of her great love for Islam." He said even the opponents and critics believe that the country had never produced the leaders that matched Bhuttos political acumen and democratic struggle. Hamza Khan, PMLN Nowshera President said Benazir Bhutto's thinking was democratic and progressive as she wanted to strengthen democracy in Pakistan. He said BB kept the torch of democracy alive by shedding her blood at Liaquat Bagh. Professor Dr AH Hilali, former Chairman, Political Science Department, University of Peshawar said that Benazir Bhutto's assassination was a great loss to the country as she was the identity of Pakistan. He said her assassination had saddened entire progressive and democratic leaders in the world. He said forces loyal to democracy should now learned that wrangling between the political parties would only strengthen hands of anti democratic forces and that our parliamentary history was replete with such happenings as evident of the murder of first prime minister Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan at Liaquat Bagh Rawalpindi in 1951.

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Politicians pays floral tributes to Benazir Bhutto on her martyrdom anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): Leader of political parties on Wednesday paid floral tributes to Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed on her 16th death anniversary and remembered her political struggle and sacrifice for strengthening of democracy in the country which would always be remembered in the political annals of history. On the eve of the martyrdom anniversary of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, Akhunzada Chattan, while talking to PTV news channel, presented salute to her unyielding resilience and unwavering vision for the nation's development. He said that Benazir Bhutto always advocated the politics of principles and had firm believe that a true



democracy was the ultimate solution to Pakistan's problems instead of sowing seeds of hatred among masses. MQM leader Sajjid Ahmad added that the services of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto for the cause of democracy in the country would always be remembered. Bhutto family rendered a great deal of sacrifices for the democracy in

the country and BB shaheed was a brave a intelligent leader, he added. Pakistan Muslim league-N leader Shaista Pervaiz Malik said that the martyrdom of Mohtarama Benazir Bhutto was a huge loss for Pakistan, adding, there are many ways to admire her lifetime services but to me, her services for democracy trump them all. Sharmila Farooqi PPP leader also paid a glowing tribute and acknowledged the sacrifices made by Benazir Bhutto that her relentless efforts for the protection of the rights of downtrodden sections of society which will always be remembered. "We will not let Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's great sacrifice go in vain," she added.

Pakistan to play leading part to strengthen 'health emergency systems' of poor countries, Minister says

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Health, Dr Nadeem Jan Wednesday on 'International Day of Epidemic Preparedness' stressed the importance of collaborative efforts and said that Pakistan would play its leading part in strengthening health emergency systems of poor countries through hosting its first global health security Summit. Talking to a Private news channel, the minister for health said that the 'Global Health Security Summit' will be held on January 10 and 11 in the federal capital of Pakistan, adding, that Pakistan will finalize its strategic road map to effectively tackle health emergencies and epidemics in the country. Holding the summit will be proof that Pakistan will play a key role in the health sector and protect

people from global epidemics, he mentioned. The minister highlighted that ongoing efforts will improve the availability of medicines, resources, infrastructure and increase production. Replying to a query, he said that Pakistan stands ready to contribute to all such endeavors and initiatives at relevant UN and WHO platforms. In this regard, "We need to develop countries that should be prioritized in terms of equitable distribution of vaccines and medicines and building their fiscal space to combat the pandemics," he added. He said that soon Pakistan will also establish a 'global pandemic financial facilities forum' which would provide equal opportunities and distribute equal resources to low-income countries for handling epidemics.

Excise to facilitate citizens for vehicle registration, transfer, token tax at Rose & Jasmine Garden

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a move to streamline services and bring them closer to the community, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon on Wednesday initiated an exclusive drive set to revitalize the Rose and Jasmine Garden parking lot 1 from 3 to 5 pm. The excise staff will be on site, offering a hassle-free experience for vehicle owners seeking registration, transfers, and token tax processing, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabasum said. This unprecedented initiative not only caters to vehicular paperwork but also introduces the ICT Doorstep Service. Imagine obtaining your Domicile Certificate, Birth Certificate, Power

of Attorney, International Driving Permit, Fuel Permit (Domestic/Commercial), or Motor Vehicle Registration, all at one convenient location. The Facilitation Center Doorstep ICT Vehicle will be present, providing a seamless and efficient solution for various administrative needs. He said that whether you're a vehicle owner looking to sort out your paperwork or in need of essential documents, this event promises efficiency with a touch of convenience. The citizens are urged not to miss this opportunity to simplify bureaucratic processes and get everything done at the Rose and Jasmine Garden parking lot today.

Intense fog disrupts PIA flights operation

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flights operating from Lahore, Multan, and Sialkot had been affected due to dense fog while some local flights faced cancellation as well. A spokesperson for the PIA warns of operational challenges in air operations due to low visibility and intense fog and flights to and from Lahore, Multan, and Sialkot may face cancellations,

changes, or delays due to challenging conditions. During this season, fog disrupts air operations in these cities, posing difficulties for aviation activities, stated by the spokesperson and added that passengers were urged to obtain information about their flights from the PIA Call Center before heading to the airport, considering potential disruptions due to fog.

NHA launches strict action against overloading of loader vehicles

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Highway Authority (NHA) has issued a detailed advisory warning the truck divers and loaders to avoid overloading their vehicles as it had initiated strict action against the vehicles violating the restrictions and burdening the national thoroughfares leading to accidents and damage to important connectivity infrastructure. The Authority with the cooperation of the National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) has initiated a stringent nationwide drive against overloaded vehicles that were jeopardizing public life, property and infrastructure. The minimum weight allowed for a two-axle Bedford truck or ve-

hicle was 17.5 tonnes, 27.5 and 29.5 tonnes for a three-axle vehicle, 39.5 tonnes and 41.5 tonnes for a four-axle vehicle, 48.5 tonnes and 49.5 tonnes of vehicles for a five-axle vehicle, 51.5 tonnes for a five-axle vehicle, 58.5 and 61.5 tonnes for eight axle vehicle. The overloading of vehicles was leading to risk to life, tyre burst, damage to roads, excessive fuel usage, early damaging of tyres, heavy fines, axle breakage, expenditure of road repairs and wastage of time. The NHA advised the masses to comply with the laws and abide by the restrictions whereas in case of violation, excessive items would be offloaded from the vehicles being charged with violation.

All set to take action against one-wheelie doers

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Traffic Police completed its preparation to launch a major crackdown against doers of one-wheelie in the provincial capital before new year night. Chief Traffic Officer Ammara Athar has issued a directive to register cases against violators. According to

a spokesperson for the department, strict action would also be taken against facilitators of one-wheelie doers during the crackdown. Ammara Athar said that special checkpoints had been established on 90 locations to curb one-wheelie and other violations.

Speeding rickshaw hits motorcycle in Shakargarh

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least one person was killed and three others sustained injuries when a speeding rickshaw driver hit a motorbike near Shakargarh Riba on Wednesday. According to rescue sources, a family was travelling on a motorcycle when a speeding rickshaw hit them, a private news channel reported. Police and rescue officials rushed to the scene and shifted the bodies and the injured to the hospital.

Son kills his mother on property matters

SARGODHA (APP): Mother was killed by her son on some property matters under the jurisdiction of Lilyani police station, here on Wednesday. Police spokesperson said that Ehsaan (45) r/o Lilyani had a property related brawl with his mother namely- Maqsoodan Bibi (67). On the day of incident he strangled her to death and threw the corpse of his mother into Lilyani canal. Police along with Rescue 1122 teams reached the spot, fished out the body from the canal, shifted to hospital for necessary legal formalities. Further investigation was under way.

Four killed 4 in carpassenger van collision

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least four passengers died when a passenger van en route to Karachi from Jams-horo met with an accident with a car on the Indus Highway on Wednesday. According to rescue sources, four individuals died on the spot while more than fifteen others including women and children were injured after a horrified collision between a car and passenger van, a private news channel reported. The injured and bodies were shifted to the hospital by rescue teams.

14 arrested, weapons narcotics recovered

SARGODHA (APP): Police arrested 14 criminals during a crackdown and recovered weapons and narcotics on Wednesday. Police said officials raided different localities and arrested Ahmed, Imran, Shahaan, Shmus, Tahir, Akram, Suleman, Rehman, Kamran, Waqar, Aslam, Nouman, Wasim and Shoiab besides recovering 2.3-kg hashish, 1.1-kg heroin, 876 liters of liquor, 195 rounds, 12 revolvers, nine pistols, four guns and valuables.

10 'gamblers' arrest

SIALKOT (APP): The Sialkot district police have arrested 10 alleged gamblers. Spokesperson said a Sialkot Saddar police station team caught Ijaz, Zafra Iqbal, Maqsood, Mubashir, Maqsood Iqbal, Akhtar Ali Khan, Shahid, Muhammad Bashir, Shehzad and Afzal indulging in gambling activity on cards. The police recovered gambling money of Rs 17,000 and cards and registered a case in this regard.

Dera Commissioner for maximum facilities to citizens

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan Division Zafarul Islam has underlined the need for implementing Khushal Khyber Pakhtunkhwa programme in letter and spirit to ensure its benefits to maximum people. He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting held in his office regarding the Khushal Khyber Pakhtunkhwa programme. The meeting was attended by deputy commissioners of Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, South Waziristan (Upper) while the deputy commissioner South Waziristan (Lower) participated through video link. During the meeting, the commissioner was briefed about the various measures taken in all districts under the Khushal Khyber Pakhtunkhwa program. Speaking on the occasion, he directed the authorities of those districts to take effective measures for provision

of better facilities to people. In this regard, he directed the officials to improve the sanitation and cleanliness condition in their respective districts besides taking measures for provision of edible items for masses at affordable rates by ensuring implementation of officially prescribed rates of commodities in markets. He said strict action should be to remove encroachments to ensure smooth flow of traffic. He was of the opinion that regular visits should be undertaken to markets to inspect prices and quality of items and action should be taken against violators. He said performance reports should be shared with the concerned authorities including the commissioner office on a weekly basis. He said that officially notified fares to different cities should also be implemented and in this regard visits should be made to bus stops.

DC inspects training of polling staff

MULTAN (APP): Deputy Commissioner and District Returning Officer Rizwan Qadeer visited the Election Training Centre, set up at Science College, to inspect the training of polling staff, here on Wednesday. According to official sources, the officials gave a briefing to the Deputy Commissioner about the training process. Deputy Commissioner Rizwan Qadeer stated that the administration was providing

every possible assistance to the Election Commission for transparent conduct of the Elections. The deputation of staff at different polling stations is in progress. In line with the Constitution, the process document scrutiny and verification of candidates' assets have also been started, he added. The district returning officer remarked that there would be no compromise on code of conduct.

Police net 17,758 lawbreakers in six months

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police managed to net 17,758 lawbreakers during last six months including 980 members of 380 criminal gangs and recovered stolen cash and other costly items worth Rs 730 million from their possession. According to a police spokesman, more than 150 stolen vehicles and over 1450 stolen motorcycles were recovered during the period. Police while conducting raids against drug traffickers rounded up over 3600 accused and seized over 63 tons hashish, 01 ton heroin, more than 08 kg Ice, 19 kg opium and over 16,000 liters liquor. Around 1100 big drug dealers were arrested during last 02 months, he added. During operations against

illegal weapons, police nabbed 2153 suspects and recovered 95 Kalashnikovs, 90 short guns, 92 rifles, 1858 pistols, 07 revolvers, 07 carbines, 60 daggers and thousands bullets. 829 accused were arrested in 151 cases against gamblers while police recovered over Rs 4.2 million stake money, 628 mobile phones, 50 motorcycles, 06 cars, and other items, he said adding, 105 accused were arrested in 29 cases registered under Sound System Act. 67 accused were sent behind the bars who were allegedly involved in 66 sexual harassment cases. In the crackdown against proclaimed offenders, 257 'A' category and 1674 'B' category criminals were arrested, he said.

Two robbers killed from firing of own accomplices

BOUREWALA (APP): At least two rubbers were killed by the firing of their accomplices during an alleged police encounter in the limits of Gagu Police Station, police said. The robbers identified as Tariq Azim and Muneer were stated to be active criminals and history sheeters. As per detail, the robber Tariq Azeem wounded a doctor named Dr Naveed by opening fire near Shah Junaid square in a robbing activity. Upon tip-off, police rushed to the spot and arrested the accused, Tariq Azeem. After the arrest, police held his accomplice, Munir, upon his identification. When

both of the criminals were taken back to the police station, unidentified four criminals suspected to be associates of the arrested robbers ambushed the cops. It resulted starting a fire exchange between both sides. As a result, as soon as the firing stopped, it was found the two robbers in custody were lying dead by the firing of their accomplices which was claimed by the police. The search for the escaped criminals was underway as different teams were constituted to trace them forthwith. DSP Zafar Iqbal reached the location along with a contingent of police officials, it was said.

Commissioner visits Holy Family hospital to review renovation project

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chatta here on Wednesday visited Holy Family Hospital and reviewed physical progress of the ongoing expansion and renovation project at the hospital. The Vice Chancellor, Rawalpindi Medical University (RMU) Dr. Umar, Medical Superintendent (MS) Holy Family Dr. Ijaz Ahmed and Xeon Building were present on the occasion. The Commissioner visited different parts of the hospital and was given a briefing by the Building Department on the ongoing work. The Commissioner was informed that 99 percent tile work at the ground floor had been completed. A two-way road would be constructed in front of the Holy Family hospital to give easy access to the hospital. The Commissioner directed the authorities that the problems of the basement of the hospital should also be solved immediately. Overall

60% work on the Holy Family Hospital had been completed, he added. The physical progress in the new building is 56% while the progress in the old building is 66%, he said adding, the deadline for the Holy Family project is February 20. The reconstruction work would be completed before the deadline. Up-gradation of 100 government hospitals is in progress across Punjab. The Holy Family is being converted into a modern hospital, he said. Work on revamping of BBH's OPD is in progress which would be completed at a cost of Rs 160 million while Rs 110 million had been provided to DHQ Rawalpindi. The Commissioner said, Punjab government was making all-out efforts to provide quality medical facilities to the residents of Rawalpindi. After completion of the Holy Family hospital, it would provide state-of-the-art medical facilities to the patients, he added.

Meeting held to review issues of forced labour

SIALKOT (APP): Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Finance and Planning Muzaffar Mukhtar has said that a plan will be made for recovery of social security dues. He said

this while addressing a meeting of the District Vigilance Committee for Anti-Forced Labour and Human Trafficking on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by District Officer La-

bour Tayyab Wirk, Deputy Director Social Welfare Sharif Ghumman, Child Protection Officer Nair Abbas and representatives of various departments.

Govt taking steps to boost foreign investment in IT sector : PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday said the government was taking steps to boost foreign investment in the Information Technology sector. "In this regard positive progress has already been made," the prime minister said while chairing the 5th meeting of Board of Governors of Special Technology Zones Authority. In a bid to promote and develop IT sector in the country, he directed the concerned authorities to chalk out necessary policies to attract the international IT experts in Pakistan. PM Kakar highlighted that the Information Technology sector could play vital role in strengthening the country's economy as Pakistan had huge potential in this sector. During the

meeting, various matters linked to the Special Technology Zones Authority came under discussion. The meeting endorsed the decisions concluded during the 4th meeting of the Board of Governors of Special Technology Authority. The meeting also approved the re-structuring of the finance, audit and technical committees of the Board of Governors of the Authority. Furthermore, the meeting also approved the presentation of drafts of the Authority's licensing framework, procedures and face regulations before the technical committee. Federal Secretaries of Cabinet, Finance, Information Technology, Science and Technology, Chief Secretaries of all the provinces and other Board members attended the meeting.

Dry weather and cold wave triggers seasonal diseases in Hazara region

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Once again during the current month severe dry weather and a cold wave gripped the Hazara division which has sparked a health crisis as a wave of respiratory illnesses, including soar throat, influenza, cold, fever, and cough, has swept. Medical specialist Dr. Junaid Sarwar Malik while talking to APP said that pneumonia, infectious diseases, notably influenza, cold, and cough, have taken on an epidemic form and people need to protect them, creating a perilous environment for residents. He further said that shockingly, every third person in the region is now affected by these respiratory diseases and allergies. Dr. Junaid strongly advised citizens to adopt precau-

tionary measures to curb the spread of these illnesses. He said that this includes the diligent use of masks and adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The residents were also advised to use warm clothing to protect themselves from the harsh weather conditions contributing to the health crisis. In response to the crisis, the government is working to gain control over the epidemic, major hospitals of the region including Ayub Medical Complex (AMC) District Headquarters Hospital, King Abdullah Hospital, Basic Health Unit (BHUs) and public hospitals of the region are being mobilized to ensure the prompt supply of essential medicines for the affected population.

Deputy Secretary Information Ministry visits regional office PID in Dera

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Deputy Secretary Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Muhammad Usman has appreciated the role of the Press Information Department (PID) regional office in Dera Ismail Khan, saying that it was playing effective part in development and prosperity of the region. He expressed these views during a visit to the PID regional office here Wednesday where Incharge Muhammad Fazal Rehman apprised him of the office's one-year performance besides other relevant issues. Speaking on the occasion,

he assured that the Ministry would extend full cooperation in resolving issues being faced by the office, which he said was playing a positive role in the development of the area. Muhammad Usman mentioned that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was playing a commendable role in highlighting national identity on the world's level in the current situation and especially the PID was effectively countering forces hostile to the country on the media front, both domestically and internationally.

KU college principals, teachers Academic Council elections on Jan 25

KARACHI (APP): The elections to the Academic Council of the University of Karachi (KU) from the college's principals and college teachers' Constituencies respectively will be held on Thursday, January 25, 2024, at the Shaikh Zayed Islamic Research Centre from 09:30 am to 4:00 pm, the KU Registrar and Returning Officer Professor Dr Abdul Waheed said in a statement issued here Wednesday. He mentioned that four principals of affiliated colleges of whom at least one will be from professional colleges and one from a women's college and 05 college teachers from the affiliated colleges should have at least five years' ser-

vice to be elected by all the principals and teachers constituencies respectively. The RO Professor Dr Abdul Waheed said that the nomination papers could be submitted by Wednesday, January 10, 2024, by 1:00 pm, in the KU Registrar's Office. According to him, the objections to the provisional voters' list, if any, could be filled by Monday, January 08, 2024, till 1:00 pm, and candidates would be able to withdraw their nomination papers by Wednesday, January 17, 2024, till 1:00 pm. The KU Registrar Professor Dr Abdul Waheed shared that the final list of candidates would be issued on Wednesday, January 17, 2024, by 4:00 pm.

Protection of Pakistan's cyberspace under PECA Act is very important :Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif Wednesday said that the protection of Pakistan's cyberspace under the PECA Act is very important. "Cybercrime, online buying and selling, cyberbullying, protection of online data, other services of our citizens, identification of threats and effective action against criminals is our core responsibility," he said in his address as chief guest at the prize distribution ceremony of Digital Pakistan Cybersecurity Hackathon. The event was organized by the National Technology Fund (Ignite), an organization of the Ministry of IT Telecom. Dr. Umar Saif further said that there was no specific organization to act against cybercrime, so a cybercrime wing was created in FIA to look after these issues. "We have established a separate agency called the National Cyber Crime Investiga-

tion Agency equipped with all the required equipment and skills," he said. The minister said gradually, the authority to act against cybercrime is being transferred from the FIA Cybercrime wing to this particular organization which will be able to take effective action against cybercrime. He was of the view that with Pakistan's cyberspace, data of public and private institutions, business transactions, and online activities of citizens can be secured effectively. The IT Minister said that the first National Cyber Emergency Response Team (National CERTS) has also been established in Pakistan, and Sectoral CERTS will be formed under this organization. In other words, the government of Pakistan has created an entire infrastructure under an effective strategy against cybercrimes, which is being rapidly implemented to make it fully functional.

President displeased over delay by HEC to attest student's degree; directs inquiry

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi has expressed displeasure over the delay by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) for not attesting the degree of a former student on flimsy grounds and upheld the orders of the Wafaqi Mohtasib directing HEC to attest her degree within seven days. The president also instructed for initiating an inquiry against delinquent official responsible for wasting precious months of the student. He gave these directions while rejecting a representation filed by HEC against a de-



cision of the Wafaqi Mohtasib directing it to attest a female student's BA degree within seven days. As per details, Savera Afridi (the complainant) had applied to HEC for attestation of her BA degree and DMC but she was

informed that since the session of her degree was 2020, it could not be attested as HEC had phased out two-year conventional B.A/B.Sc. program and the universities were not allowed to enrol students in conventional B.A/B.Sc. program after the academic year 2019. Feeling aggrieved, the complainant approached the Wafaqi Mohtasib who passed the orders in her favour. The HEC then filed a representation as well as a review petition with the Mohtasib, which were rejected.

Household items gutted, girl injured

FAISALABAD (APP): Precious items in a house were reduced to ashes while a young girl received serious burn injuries during a fire incident in the area of Nishatabad police station. Rescue 1122 spokesman said here on Wednesday that fire erupted in a house situated in Nigahbanpur Iqba Park on Jhumra Road due to short-circuiting. The fire engulfed the entire surroundings and burnt precious items of the house. Receiving information, fire fighters of Rescue-1122 rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control after hectic efforts. Due to fire incident, a young girl namely Hina (23) daughter of Aslam received burn injuries and started feeling dilapidated condition due to suffocation owing to smoke. Rescue 1122 shifted the injured to Allied Hospital after providing her first aid, he added.

Dengue cases exceed 15,060 during current year

ISLAMABAD (APP): The number of dengue cases has surpassed 15,060 at Punjab in the current year with four new cases reported during the last 24 hours in the provincial capital. Secretary Punjab Health Department, Ali Jan Khan told a private news channel that Rawalpindi has so far reported 2,654 dengue cases in the current year. As many as 16 patients of dengue fever were currently admitted to hospitals of the province, he added. Dengue virus is a mosquito-borne viral disease that has rapidly spread in recent years around the world. Dengue virus is transmitted by female mosquitoes mainly of the species Aedes aegypti and, to a lesser extent, Ae. albopictus.

Three arrested, weapons recovered

FAISALABAD (APP): Police on Wednesday claimed to have arrested three robbers and recovered weapons and other items. A police spokesman said three robbers had looted a shop at Bhaiwala Phattak in Millat Town police limits and injured the shopkeeper three days ago. Later, officials arrested the accused after recovering weapons who confessed the crime of injuring the shopkeeper.

RPO conducts Open Court to address public grievances

RAWALPINDI (APP): Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Region Syed Khurram Ali conducted an open court in the regional office under the open door policy here on Wednesday. In the open court, citizens from the districts of Rawalpindi region submitted applications for change of investigation and redressal of other complaints. During open court, RPO issued orders to the SP Saddar Division for the inquiry of the case filed by the petitioner Nargis Jahan resident of Gujjar Khan in Jatli police station while Tariq Mehmood resident of District Chakwal filed an application that the plot has been occupied by the land grabbers. RPO issued directives to SDPO Chakwal for redressal. Abdul Hameed resident of Islamabad filed an application that the case registered in Waris Khan police station is baseless and an inquiry should be conducted, on which orders were issued to SDPO Waris Khan for an immediate inquiry.

District health office advises immediate action after dog bite to prevent Rabies

ABBOTTABAD (APP): In a critical advisory, the district health office in Abbottabad on Wednesday urged citizens who have been bitten by a dog to take immediate action to prevent the potential transmission of rabies. The severity of the situation emphasizes the importance of swift response. Experts recommend not wasting time deliberating on whether the dog was rabid or domesticated. Instead, individuals are urged to head directly to the nearest government hospital, as emergency services there are highly equipped

to handle such cases daily, ensuring prompt and effective treatment. For those facing a considerable distance to the hospital, it is advised to wash the wound meticulously with soap and running water for a minimum of fifteen minutes. Importantly, the wound should be left open and not bandaged before seeking medical attention. It was highlighted that the 14-day course of treatment has been terminated and now the recommended course of action involves a three-dose vaccine regimen scheduled over a week (0-3-7).

SNGPL disconnects 238 connections, imposes fine of Rs. 3.41 mln

ISLAMABAD (APP):Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL), in its ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Islamabad, has disconnected 238 more connections and imposed a fine of Rs 3.41 million on pilferers. The regional team in Lahore took action by disconnecting 26 connections due to illegal gas usage and 9 others for the use of compressors, imposing a fine of Rs 0.26 million in gas theft cases said a spokesperson of the SNGPL. The team in Rawalpindi disconnected 4 connections due to illegal gas usage and another one for the use of a compressor. Meanwhile, the team in Islamabad disconnected eight connections for illegal gas usage. In

Multan, 3 connections were cut off due to illegal gas usage and another 10 for the use of compressors. In Peshawar and Karak, SNGPL disconnected 80 connections for the direct use of gas and imposed a fine of Rs 2.4 million against gas theft cases, also filing two FIRs against gas pilferers. In Sahiwal, one connection was disconnected due to illegal gas usage. In Sialkot, the team disconnected two connections for illegal gas usage, imposing a fine of Rs 0.09 million against gas theft cases. In Sheikhupura, 35 connections were disconnected for illegal gas usage, with an additional 2 for the use of compressors, and a fine of Rs 0.03 million was imposed against gas theft cases.

Research vital for overcoming climatic disaster: Solangi

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Wednesday that climatic disaster was one of the biggest challenges the country was facing currently, and acquisition of research-oriented knowledge was vital to tackle it. He expressed these views while addressing the 4th convocation of Information Technology University (ITU) Punjab here. Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman, ITU Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Adnan Noor Mian, vice chancellors (VCs) of various universities, ITU Dean Faculty of Sciences Prof. Dr. Arif Mehmood, Dean Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Dr. Yaqoob Bangash, Dean Faculty of business and Management Sciences Dr. Sara Khawar, faculty members

and a large number of students and their parents attended the event. He said, "We observe the negative effects of global warming and other climatic changes every day; therefore, we have to play our due role to protect the natural environment." The federal minister said that Pakistan was faced with challenges of economic depression, intolerance and violent behaviours also. Emphasising the important role of students to overcome these challenges, he said that only those nations attain the uphill tasks of development and prosperity which face the challenges firmly, asserting that education was the most important tool to overcome these challenges. Pakistan could also fast progress and develop only through the acquisition and promotion of knowledge, he added.

Iqbal's poetry, philosophy and thought were universal: Madad Ali Sindhi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Madad Ali Sindhi on Wednesday said that Iqbal's poetry, philosophy and thought were, undoubtedly, universal and his message was for the people of the whole world. Iqbal's message is as fresh as ever and we still need it today, the minister said while addressing the opening session of a two-day international conference on "Iqbal's Thought in the Perspective of 21st Century and Two Great Poets of Islam: Iqbal and Akif" at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). The conference was organized by the Department of Iqbal Studies AIOU in collaboration with Yunus Emre Institute. Madad Ali Sindhi mentioned that Iqbal's thought provided a solution to the problems of today and served as a guiding light for all human beings. Iqbal's political philosophy is a source of strength for democracy in Pakistan, he said. He expressed his delight over the presence of eminent intellectuals and Iqbal enthusiasts from all over Pakistan, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey at the conference. The feder-

al minister congratulated Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor AIOU and his entire team for organizing this international conference on Iqbal. Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood mentioned that the University was one of the few universities which had established a Department of Iqbal Studies to promote Iqbal's thoughts and poetry. He stated that through this department, we aimed to convey the message of Allama Iqbal to the youth. Dr. Nasir emphasized the need to elaborate and explain Iqbal's thoughts to train the new generation. Turkish Ambassador Mehmet Pacici and Dr. Halil Tokar commented that Iqbal's poetry had profoundly impacted the Turkish nation. In Turkey, there have been many translations of Iqbal's poetry and research work on Iqbal is being conducted in Turkish universities, he said and added, however, in Pakistan, Muhammad Akif is not recognized, and in collaboration with AIOU, the Yunus Emre Institute will promote the poetry and thoughts of the Turkish poet Muhammad Akif in Pakistan.

UAE unveils teaching specialists program to employ 4k Emiratis

RIYADH (Agencies): The UAE is set to bolster its education sector by launching a comprehensive training and employment program aimed at employing 4,000 Emiratis. The initiative, known as the Teaching Specialists Program, is a collaborative effort between the UAE's Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, the Ministry of Education, and the Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council. Scheduled to kick off in 2024, the program targets the



annual recruitment of 1,000 Emiratis in the education sector over a four-year period. The initiative encompasses specialized training and bridging programs designed to equip education professionals for

the dynamic job market, the Emirates News Agency, WAM, reported. Beyond training, the program will offer professional accreditation opportunities, ensuring Emirati nationals acquire the necessary qualifications to excel in the private education sector. The initiative will also support private educational institutions in meeting their annual Emiratisation targets by facilitating employment contracts with program participants.

US, Europe drive Toyota to record sales, output in November

TOKYO (Agencies): Toyota Motor Corp's sales and production reached new records in November, thanks to steady vehicle demand across North America and Europe. Global sales — including that of subsidiaries Hino Motors Ltd and Daihatsu Motor Co — rose 12% from a year earlier to 986,262 units, the most ever for the month of November, the company said Wednesday. Worldwide production reached an all-time high at 1,067,446 units. The world's biggest carmaker has been making and selling an unprecedented number



of automobiles throughout the year, further securing its dominance with hybrid cars as it pushes forward with ambitious plans to mass produce electric vehicles and catch up with Elon Musk's Tesla Inc and China's BYD Co. Last week, Toyota was dragged into a growing scandal after an inves-

tigation found that Daihatsu had manipulated collision safety data dating as far back as 1989. Daihatsu will suspend operations through January and compensate its partners for the losses they incur, it said this week. Toyota suffered a different scandal last year with its other major subsidiary, Hino, over falsified emissions data. It's not clear yet how much the latest scandal will cost, in terms of output, money and customer trust. Daihatsu supplies cars and parts to Mazda Motor Corp, Subaru Corp and a number of other major brands.

India's crackdown on financial risks puts industry on watch

NEW DELHI (Agencies): A week after India barred lenders from investing in alternative investment funds (AIF) that hold stakes in their borrowers, the market is counting the cost. The Reserve Bank of India said the move is designed to prevent an unstable build up of assets in the country's financial system. But, lawyers and analysts say alternative investment fund managers could see costs ramp up and the rules will make it harder to raise cash in the future. "This is a sledge hammer to the industry," said Vinod Joseph, partner at Economic Laws Practice, a legal firm. The top seven shadow



lenders in the country had invested around US\$1.35 billion in these so-called AIFs, according to their most recent annual reports. Shares of these firms dived after the new rules, that directed existing investments to either be liquidated in 30 days or for lenders to provision their investment in the AIFs. The RBI's

move added to jitters in the market. Sentiment was already shaken after the central bank last month imposed stricter rules to stem the relentless rise in risky consumer loans, actions called "draconian" by one analyst. Its report on financial stability risks is set to be released this week. RBI has been concerned about round-tripping of potentially bad loans, rise of unsecured lending and heavier linkages between AIFs and regulated entities, all of which can "potentially build up stress in the financial sector," said Abizer Diwanji, financial services leader at Ernst & Young India.

Japan nuclear regulator removes hurdle for Tepco plant restart

TOKYO (Agencies): Japan's regulator cleared one hurdle for the nation's top utility to restart the world's largest nuclear power plant. The Nuclear Regulation Authority decided to remove the de-facto ban on operations at Tokyo Electric Power Co's Kashiwazaki Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata prefecture, public broadcaster NHK reported. It's a positive step for Tepco, which was banned from restarting the plant in 2021 after a slew of serious security



breaches were found at the facility. Japan's nuclear watchdog said earlier this month that safety issues surrounding the power plant have now been corrected. Still, the utility will

have to clear other hurdles to resume operations, such as getting a nod of approval from the local government. Japan has been shifting toward the use of atomic power in an effort to bolster energy supply, cut dependence on imported fossil fuel and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Yet power producers like Tepco need to pass a stringent protocol set by the regulator to restart reactors that have been offline since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

BYD set to overtake Tesla as world's most popular EV maker

BEIJING (Agencies): China's BYD Co bills itself as the biggest car brand you've never heard of. It might need a different tagline soon. The automaker is poised to surpass Tesla Inc as the new worldwide leader in fully electric vehicle sales. When it does — likely in the current quarter — it will be both a symbolic turning point for the EV market and further confirmation of China's growing clout in the global automotive industry. In a sector still dominated by more famil-



iar names like Toyota Motor Corp, Volkswagen AG and General Motors Co, Chinese manufacturers including BYD and SAIC Motor Corp are making serious inroads. After leap-

frogging the US, South Korea and Germany over the past few years, China now rivals Japan for the global lead in passenger car exports. Some 1.3 million of the 3.6 million vehicles shipped from the mainland as of October this year were electric. "The competitive landscape of the auto industry has changed," said Bridget McCarthy, head of China operations for Shenzhen-based hedge fund Snow Bull Capital, which has invested in both BYD and Tesla.

Saudi Cabinet approves MoU with Turkiye in field of energy

RIYADH (Agencies): The Saudi Cabinet on Tuesday approved the signing of two memorandums of understanding with Turkiye and the Netherlands to boost cooperation in the field of energy. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman chaired the weekly session in Riyadh during which several international, regional, and local developments were discussed. The ministers also reviewed the Kingdom's economy and the



progress of different government-led initiatives. During the session, the ministers approved the signing of MoUs with different countries to bol-

ster Saudi Arabia's ties across various sectors. The approvals included an MoU between the Saudi Justice Ministry and Hong Kong, the Tourism Ministry, and Iraq. The ministers also approved the signing of a memorandum in the field of intellectual property between Saudi Arabia and Morocco. The Investment Ministry was authorized to sign a deal with Argentina to promote direct investments.

'Assassin's Creed' publisher Ubisoft probes hack attempt

PARIS (Agencies): 'Assassin's Creed' publisher Ubisoft today said it was investigating a suspected data security breach, in the latest cyberattack against a major actor in the video game industry. Hackers attempted to snatch 900 gigabytes from Ubisoft servers but the French studio's security team rebuffed the breach on Thursday, according to malware information website vx-underground. "We are aware of an alleged data security incident and are currently investigating," a



Ubisoft spokesman told AFP today. The French company's other major titles include 'Far Cry' and 'Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora'. Sony unit Insomniac Games was hit by a ransomware attack last week. After

Insomniac refused to pay, the hackers revealed company information, as well as material related to video game projects 'Wolverine' and 'Spider-Man 3'. "We're both saddened and angered about the recent criminal cyberattack on our studio and the emotional toll it's taken on our dev (development) team," Insomniac said on social media platform X, formerly Twitter. Insomniac said personal information of its staff, former employees and independent contractors had been stolen.

Tesla plans revamp of smash hit Model Y from China plant

SHANGHAI (Agencies): Tesla Inc is preparing to roll out a revamped version of its smash hit Model Y from its Shanghai plant, according to people familiar with the matter, as domestic rivals accelerate product launches amid heated competition. The US electric carmaker is currently conducting preparation work in China for its refreshed Model Y sport utility vehicle and mass production may start as soon as mid-2024, the people said, asking not to be identified because the information isn't public. The 2024 version of the Model Y will have much more obvious exterior and interior changes than the most-recent update in October, which added a new wheel design and ambient lighting, the people said, declining to elaborate. The first batch of the newest



Model Ys will be made from the second phase of Tesla's Shanghai facility, which will suspend production for around a week during the New Year holiday for a partial upgrade, one of the people said. More adjustments will have to be made prior to mass production, they added. A representative for Tesla in China declined to comment. Established in 2019, Tesla's Shanghai factory now produces over half of the electric carmaker's global deliveries.

Dubai's red-hot property market braces for a slowdown

DUBAI (Agencies): Just nine months after buying their first property in Dubai, Dina Habib and Karim Yusuf are already planning their next move within the city. The Egyptian couple, who spent eight years renting in the emirate, are selling their two-bedroom apartment in the Jumeirah Village Circle district on the edge of Dubai for a 26% premium over the 1.7 million dirhams (US\$460,000) they paid for the property in March. Habib is hoping to secure a larger property for her family of three for the same price or less. "For many years, we've paid someone else's mortgage because we were scared to buy in a market that went up and down," said the 39-year-old researcher. "Now, we think the market may have peaked and so we're planning to sell and



buy a house with a garden next year when prices hopefully fall a bit." Habib and Yusuf are among hundreds of thousands of homeowners attempting to navigate Dubai's red-hot housing market, which has outperformed most others around the world this year. They join tenants, property analysts and developers in trying to predict whether the market is finally starting to turn as a slew of new properties are delivered and global economic uncertainty catches up with the emirate.

Philippines attracts four bids for main airport's US\$3bil upgrade

MANILA (Agencies): The Philippines attracted four bidders in an auction for the 170.6 billion pesos (US\$3 billion) upgrade of its main international airport, the transportation ministry said on Wednesday. Ranked by some travel service firms among the world's worst international gateways, the ageing Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), the fifth largest in Southeast Asia, needs an upgrade to solve chronic flight delays and passenger congestion. "This is a very important project of the government as we want all our passengers improved travel experience," transportation



secretary Jaime Bautista said on Wednesday. "You all know this airport is very very congested." Firms that submitted bids were the Manila International Airport Consortium, Asian Airport Consortium, GMR Airports Consortium, and SMC SAP & Co Consortium, the bids and awards committee said.

Shipping firms take first steps towards Red Sea return

FRANKFURT (Agencies): France's CMA CGM is increasing the number of vessels travelling through the Suez Canal, it said on Tuesday, joining Maersk in returning to the area after US-led efforts to prevent attacks. The world's top shipping companies, including Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd, stopped using Red Sea routes after Yemen's Houthi militant group began targeting vessels this month, disrupting global trade through the Suez Canal. Instead they have rerouted via southern Africa, a longer and more expensive journey. The canal is the quickest sea route between Asia and Europe.



Shipping firms are now reviewing whether it is safe to return after the US announced a multinational maritime security initiative in the Red Sea in response to attacks on vessels by Yemen's Houthis. CMA CGM has undertaken "an in-depth evaluation of the security landscape", it said in a statement.

Dollar under pressure on rate cut wagers in thin holiday market

SINGAPORE (Agencies): The dollar remained under pressure on Wednesday, while the euro flirted with a four month peak, as expectations that the Federal Reserve would soon cut interest rates take hold in the market, with thin year-end flows keeping movements limited. With traders out for holidays globally until the New Year, the curtailed week is likely to see muted volumes. The dollar index, which measures the US currency against six rivals, was at 101.54, just shy of the five month low of 101.42 it touched last week. The index is on course for a 1.9% drop in 2023 after two straight years of strong gains on the back of the Fed hiking rates to battle inflation. The recent weakness in the dollar has been a result of the markets anticipating rate cuts from the Fed next year denting the appeal of the greenback. Markets are now pricing in a 79%



chance of a rate cut starting in March 2024, according to CME FedWatch tool, with as much as 153 basis points of cuts priced in for next year. "With little to speak of on the economic calendar for this week between global holidays, we do not expect a large swing in pricing to wrap up this calendar year," said analysts at Monex USA. "Liquidity across the world will remain quite thin as many offices remain closed, which could give us some choppiness in markets, but largely this week is expected to remain fairly uneventful."

Nadal, Osaka in Australia comebacks as Djokovic targets more glory

SYDNEY (Agencies): Rafael Nadal returns from a “winding, tortuous” injury journey in Brisbane this week, while fellow superstar Novak Djokovic kick-starts his bid for an unprecedented 11th Australian Open title at Perth. It appeared last season that the veterans, with 46 Grand Slam crowns between them, may never share a competitive court again. But the prospect is back in play with Spain's Nadal recovering from hip surgeries that sidelined him for almost a year. He begins what is set to be a farewell season at the Brisbane International from Dec. 31-Jan. 7 alongside Andy Murray and world No.



8 Holger Rune. Top-ranked Djokovic has opted for the mixed teams United Cup in Perth and Sydney, starting Friday, as have fellow top 10 players Stefanos Tsitsipas, Alexander Zverev and Taylor Fritz. Barring last-minute setbacks, Nadal and Djokovic will then

grace the courts of Melbourne Park for the Australian Open from Jan.14, perhaps for the last time together. The 22-time Grand Slam tournament winner Nadal has not played since a second-round loss to American Mackenzie McDonald at the Australian Open this year, leading to what coach Carlos Moya said was “a winding, tortuous road, with many curves.” Now 37, Nadal said he expects “nothing” from himself this time around. “I have internalized what I have had throughout my life, which is demand myself the maximum,” he said in announcing his return.

Liverpool go top as Nunez strikes, Hojlund caps Man United fightback

LONDON (Agencies): Liverpool climbed to the top of the Premier League as Darwin Nunez ended his goal drought to inspire a 2-0 win against Burnley, while Rasmus Hojlund broke his own barren run to cap Manchester United's thrilling fightback to beat Aston Villa 3-2 on Tuesday. Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool took an early lead through Nunez at Turf Moor and held on despite wasting a host of chances. Nunez's eighth goal this season was his first for 12 games since he netted against Bournemouth in the League Cup on Nov. 1. Diogo Jota, back from a month's injury absence,



wrapped up the victory late on to leave Liverpool two points above second placed Arsenal, who have a game in hand. Arsenal can regain top spot with a victory at home to West Ham on Thursday. After successive draws with Manchester United and Arsenal pri-

or to Christmas, this was an essential victory for Liverpool's title ambitions. On Liverpool being in pole position, Klopp said: “That's nice. It will probably change and that's no problem. It was not perfect but we are where we are.” At Old Trafford, United were in danger of another damaging defeat when goals from John McGinn and Leander Dendoncker put Villa in control by halftime at Old Trafford. Erik ten Hag's team were booed off at the interval but they staged a much-needed revival, sparked by Alejandro Garnacho scoring their first goal in seven hours and 20 minutes.

Portuguese football star Joao Felix spends festive period touring Saudi Arabia

RIYADH (Agencies): Portuguese football star Joao Felix spent the festive period with his family in Saudi Arabia, visiting some of its most famous landmarks. Felix, who plays for FC Barcelona, arrived in the Kingdom ahead of the boxing match between Joshua Wallin and Wilder Parker on Saturday in Riyadh. During his stay, Felix took to Instagram to share a glimpse of his experiences. On Tuesday, he posted a picture of himself at VIA Riyadh, the capital's latest luxury destination. This location boasts a range of exclusive restaurants, a cin-



ema, the first St. Regis Hotel in Saudi Arabia, and luxurious shopping. Earlier on Monday, the 24-year-old uploaded an Instagram story from Diriyah, a site of historical significance as the birthplace of Saudi Arabia, with

his father, mother and younger brother. The family's travels also included a visit to AIUla, where they took a memorable mirror selfie at the famed Maraya building. Hugo Felix, Joao's younger brother and a player for the Lisbon-based football club Benfica, also shared several moments from their trip on social media. His posts, which were captioned in Arabic saying “Merry Christmas everyone,” included diverse experiences such as a helicopter ride, visiting a traditional Bedouin tent, enjoying local cuisine, and interacting with animals.

Khawaja accuses ICC of double standards over Gaza support

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Australia opener Usman Khawaja has again accused the International Cricket Council (ICC) of double standards after being refused permission to display a dove of peace on his bat during the Boxing Day test. The Pakistan-born Khawaja, who has been keen to show his support for the people of Gaza during the ongoing conflict in the enclave, was reprimanded for wearing a black armband in the first test against Pakistan in Perth earlier this month. He had originally intended to show his support by writing the messag-



es “Freedom is a human right” and “All lives are equal” on his boots in the colors of the Palestinian flag but that gesture also fell foul of ICC regulations. Khawaja had worked with Cricket Australia on a new way to show his support by having the

dove on his bat accompanied by the message “01: UDHR” in a reference to the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to The Australian newspaper, the ICC also refused to allow him to display the message. There was no immediate reply to a request for comment on the matter from the ICC. In a video on Instagram late on the eve of the second test against Pakistan at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), Khawaja posted pictures of other international players with religious symbols and messages on their bats.

Saudi Hockey Federation launches schools championship

RIYADH (Agencies): The Saudi Hockey Federation is organizing the second Schools Championship, which will begin on Dec. 27. Thirty students representing five teams will compete at the Al-Arqam school in Riyadh for the championship title. The tournament is the second in a series of initiatives organized by the federation to support stu-



dent sporting activities. It comes as

part of efforts by the federation to promote field hockey among Saudi students taking part in school sports. The federation has signed cooperation agreements with several schools across the Kingdom, resulting in training programs introducing students to field hockey, and encouraging physical activity among students.

Belarusian star Aryna Sabalenka clinches fourth win against Ons Jabeur, seals match in two hours

RIYADH (Agencies): Belarusian tennis player Aryna Sabalenka, ranked second globally, won Tuesday's Riyadh Season Cup for Women's Tennis. Sabalenka outplayed Tunisian player Ons Jabeur, ranked sixth globally, with two sets to one in their match held at the Kingdom Arena, one of the new venues to host Riyadh Season's activities. This marks the Belarusian's fourth victory over Jabeur in their fifth encounter, having won three times before, while the Tunisian secured a single win. Audiences started gathering at the venue



at 6:30 p.m., eagerly anticipating the final championship match organized by the Saudi General Entertainment Authority. Djokovic and Alcaraz vie for the title The Saudi capital is set to host the match on Wednesday be-

tween Serbian Novak Djokovic, the top-ranked tennis player, and Spanish contender Carlos Alcaraz for the Riyadh Season Cup for Men's Tennis. Djokovic holds the edge over Alcaraz, having defeated him three times in official tournament finals, while the Spaniard prevailed twice, as reported by the ATP website specializing in global tennis. The highly anticipated showdown between the two global stars will commence at 7 p.m. Tickets are available on the WeBook app starting from SR100 (\$27).

Two-way battle for lead as storms force eight out of Sydney-Hobart

SYDNEY (Agencies): Two 100-foot supermaxis battled for the lead Wednesday in a storm-struck Sydney-Hobart race fleet reduced to 95 yachts after eight entrants pulled out of the punishing ocean event. In a gripping late-morning struggle, LawConnect edged less than one nautical mile ahead of the favorite Andoo Comanche after a “cat-and-mouse” chase, with the lead switching throughout the night. The duo were left in a duel after Hong Kong-owned supermaxi SHK Scallywag, which had been in a three-way battle for the lead, became the first major casualty on Tuesday evening when it suffered a broken bowsprit. “We are pretty close after we were neck and



neck overnight,” LawConnect captain Ty Oxley said in a racing update just a couple of hours before retaking the lead. “It's raining and there are squalls everywhere, clouds on the horizon,” Oxley added, reporting winds of more than 30 knots, sometimes exceeding 40 knots, as the rivals sailed southwards across the Bass Strait toward the Tasmanian capital.

Ronaldo double helps Nassr see off Ittihad

Cristiano Ronaldo struck twice to lead Al-Nassr to an entertaining 5-2 win at Al-Ittihad on Tuesday to move to within seven points of leaders Al-Hilal. While Hilal may keep winning, their Riyadh rivals are also showing that they can keep in touch at the top of the table. It was end-to-end stuff in Jeddah as the hosts and defending champions looked to bounce back from some indifferent form of late against the visitors from Riyadh. Despite the margin of victory in the end, the game was in the balance until midway through the second half when Ittihad were reduced to ten men following a second yellow card shown to midfielder Fabinho, with Ronaldo firing home from the spot to give Al-Nassr a 3-2 lead. Plenty happened before then however. Ittihad were looking to recover from



a disappointing campaign at the FIFA Club World Cup and also a 3-1 loss to Al-Raed in the league last week. It started well as Karim Benzema set up Abderrazak Hamdallah for the opening goal after 14 minutes, which came against the run of play. After picking up the ball in the left corner of the area, there was still work for Hamdallah to do. He went past two defenders and then fired a low shot under the diving Abdullah Al-Mayouf, who perhaps should have done a little better.

Inoue KOs Tapales to become undisputed super bantamweight champion

TOKYO(Agencies): Japan's Naoya Inoue became an undisputed world champion at a second weight on Tuesday after knocking out the Philippines' Marlon Tapales in the 10th round to claim all four super-bantamweight belts. The unbeaten Inoue, nicknamed “Monster,” sent Tapales to the canvas with a huge right hand to add the WBA and IBF titles to his own WBC and WBO belts. Inoue, who took his record to 26-0 with 23 KOs, becomes only the second man to unify all four world titles in two different weight classes. American Terence Crawford became the first after beating compatriot Errol Spence for all the welterweight belts in July. “I think super bantamweight is the most suitable weight



class for me at the moment,” said the 30-year-old Inoue. “Next year and the year after that, I want to prove that I can become an even stronger fighter.” Inoue completed his rampage through the bantamweight division in December last year, becoming the first undisputed world champion at the weight in half a century before vacating his titles. He needed just two fights to become the super bantamweight division's first-ever undisputed champion.

DAILY HOROSCOPE: DECEMBER 28, 2023



time for you to see about exploring your artistic side.

– **VIRGO**: You need to try to stretch yourself out somewhat -- it's a good time to see if you can sneak away from work or wherever you feel too pressed for time. It may be a good time for a mental health day.

– **LIBRA**: You're the logical choice to lead a group of coworkers, fellow students or family members -- and it feels right to everyone involved. Now is a good time to get input and make plans.

– **SCORPIO**: You don't mind playing power games when other people start them -- and today should bring the culmination of a long struggle. You may need to bob and weave and try something tricky.

– **SAGITTARIUS**: Stop playing it safe -- if you have been, that is! Your amazing personal energy means it's time to move beyond your comfort zone and try something a little riskier than usual. Go for it!

– **CAPRICORN**: Be careful with sharing today -- while you are pretty generous on typical days, right now, you are at risk of giving away the store if you're not paying attention! Pull back for now and give it away later.

– **ACQUARIUS**: Your primary relationship -- romantic or otherwise -- is much on your mind right now, and it's a safe bet that you need to do something big to keep it from stagnating. You're the master of big plays, though!

– **PISCES**: Try to keep your eyes on your own work today -- you've got enough going on without worrying about what others are up to! It's one of those days when you're just better served doing your own thing.

– It's a general reading which may differ from person to person because of time date and year.

– **ARIES**: You need to deal with kid-related business today, even if you're childless yourself. Maybe you're called on to babysit, or maybe it's time to sit down with someone close and talk about the future.

– **TAURUS**: You're sure of yourself today -- maybe a bit too much? It's a good time for you to pull back a bit and review exactly where you are and what you want to do, as things are getting crazy.

– **GEMINI**: Social energy lights you up today, and you should have lots of good fun with your people, as long as they don't mind endless discussions about what to do and where to go -- those are fun for you!

– **CANCER**: Though you are no doubt tempted to save money on today's purchases, you need to spend a little extra to ensure quality. If it lasts longer, does the job better or is just more satisfying, you win.

– **LEO**: You need to use that amazing creative energy that is flowing through you today -- otherwise, you might just feel stagnant! It's a great

Russia, Iran Officially Ditch U.S. Dollar for Trade

MOSCOW (Agencies): Russia and Iran have finalized an agreement to trade in their local currencies instead of the U.S. dollar, Iran's state media has reported. Both countries are subject to U.S. sanctions. "Banks and economic actors can now use infrastructures including non-SWIFT interbank systems to deal in local currencies," Iran's state media has declared. Moscow has lately been cozying up to Tehran, with Iran revealing in November it will provide Russia with Su-35 fighter jets, Mi-28 attack helicopters and Yak-130 pilot training aircraft. The global de-dol-



larization drive has been going on for years with BRIC countries and the so-called pariah states trying to ditch the American dollar in favor of other currencies. Back in 2019, Putin declared that time was ripe to review the dollar's role in trade. At that time, Russia and China con-

sidered switching to the euro, the world's second most dominant currency, as an acceptable stalemate, with the ultimate goal being to use their own currencies. Earlier in the current year, Russia paid dividends from the Sakhalin 1 and 2 oil projects in Chinese yuan instead of the dollar. Last year, Russia was cut off from the US dollar-dominated global payments systems following sweeping sanctions off the Ukraine war. Russia has declared it will no longer accept the American currency as payment for its energy commodities but will instead switch to Chinese and Emirati currencies.

Mexico hails unspecified 'important' deals with US in talks on migration, trade

Mexico City (Agencies): Mexico said on Wednesday it had struck unspecified "important" deals with the United States after talks that U.S. officials sought to focus on curbing record-high migration, a key issue in next year's U.S. elections. Secretary of State Antony Blinken led the closed-door negotiations for the U.S. side, and Mexican Foreign Minister Alicia Barcena told reporters she had pushed U.S. officials to ease any remaining curbs on cross-border trade. The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden is seeking the help of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador to reduce a record high number of migrants wanting to enter the world's wealthiest economy from Mexico, a key issue with voters ahead of Biden's expected re-election bid next year. In a post on social media, Lopez Obrador hailed what he described as "important agreements" following the talks with U.S. officials, but without giving any details on the deals. Lopez Obrador said he had requested the meeting to discuss cooperation on migration, the economy and security. The meetings come after more than half a million migrants this year crossed the dangerous Darien Gap jungle connecting South America with Central America – double last year's record – with many fleeing crime, poverty and conflict to seek better prospects in the United States. Earlier this month, the U.S. border authorities temporarily closed two key rail border crossings for five days and shuttered other crossings in order to redeploy enforcement resources elsewhere in response to spiking migration. In remarks outside Lopez Obrador's downtown offices, Barcena described reopening the crossings as a "priority" for Mexico. "We are talking about the economic part, as well as the structural causes of migration," she said. Last week, Lopez Obrador pledged to help ease migratory pressures on the United States and earlier on Wednesday he urged U.S. lawmakers to invest more to help the poor in Latin America and the Caribbean "instead of putting up barriers, barbed wire fences in the river, or thinking about building walls." Former U.S. President Donald Trump, the leading candidate to take on Biden in 2024, has promised to crack down on illegal immigration and restrict legal immigration if elected. During his previous term, Trump focused on building a wall on the Mexico border. His administration built 450 miles (725 km) of barriers across the roughly 2,000-mile (3,200-km) border, but much of that replaced existing structures. Lopez Obrador met with Blinken, while the U.S. delegation also included Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who leads border security efforts. "We had a very productive meeting," Mayorkas said in a post on X, adding that "the regional challenge of migration requires regional solutions." Earlier, thousands of migrants and asylum seekers marched slowly north hoping to reach the U.S. border. "We don't need to go back to our country if we don't have anything there," said Nohemia Zendejas, a mother on the road with four children.

Indian PM Modi discusses strategic partnership, West Asia situation with Saudi Crown Prince

New Delhi (Agencies): Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a conversation with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and discussed the future of the strategic partnership between India and Saudi Arabia. The two leaders also discussed the situation in West Asia amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. They expressed concerns regarding terrorism and the loss of civilian lives. They further agreed to work together for peace, security and stability in the region. "Held a good conversation with my Brother HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on the future of Strategic Partnership between India and Saudi Arabia. We exchanged views on the West Asia situation and shared concerns regarding terrorism, violence and the loss of civilian lives. Agreed to work together for peace, security and stability in the region," PM Modi posted on X (formerly Twitter). Earlier this year, Salman visited India for the G20 summit in New Delhi. During his visit, he also held bilateral talks with PM Modi and President



Droupadi Murmu. The two leaders also held the first leaders' meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council. After the meeting, PM Modi said that the economic corridor between India, West Asia and Europe will provide economic growth and digital connectivity between these regions. He noted that the co-operation between India and Saudi Arabia in the economic sector is vital for the peace and stability of the entire region. President Droupadi Murmu also hosted a banquet in honour of the Saudi Crown Prince and noted that the two nations shared cultural experiences, economic synergies and a common commitment towards a peaceful and sustainable world.

Iran's Raisi to visit Turkey in January for talks on Gaza war, bilateral ties

- Turkey and Iran have usually had complicated ties, standing at loggerheads on a host of issues, primarily the Syrian civil war. ANKARA (Agencies): Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will visit Ankara on January 4 to meet his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan for talks likely to focus on the situations in Gaza and Syria as well as bilateral ties, a Turkish official said on Tuesday. A planned visit by Raisi in late November was postponed due to the conflicting schedules of the two regional powers' foreign ministers, the official also said. At the time, Turkey's foreign minister was in New York as part of a "contact group" of Muslim countries on Gaza. Turkey, which supports a two-state solution to the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has harshly criticised Israel for its attacks on Gaza, called for an immediate ceasefire, and said Israeli leaders should be tried in international courts for war crimes. While it has ramped up its rhetoric against Israel since it launched its air and ground assault on Gaza in retaliation for Palestinian militant group Hamas' October 7 attack, Turkey has also maintained commercial ties with Israel, prompting criticism from some opposition parties and Iran. Unlike its Western allies and some Arab nations, NATO member Turkey



does not consider Hamas a terrorist organisation. It has maintained close ties to the militant group. Its neighbour to the east, Iran stands at the head of what it calls the "Axis of Resistance," a loose coalition that includes Hamas as well as armed Shia Muslim groups around the region that have militarily confronted Israel and its Western allies. It has voiced support for Hamas and warned of wider consequences if the fighting in Gaza continues. Turkey and Iran have usually had complicated ties, standing at loggerheads on a host of issues, primarily the Syrian civil war. Ankara politically and militarily backs rebels looking to oust President Bashar al-Assad, while Tehran supports his government. While several rounds of talks have been held between Syrian, Turkish, Iranian and Russian representatives to find a political solution to the war, Ankara has also moved to improve ties with Assad as part of a regional diplomatic push launched in 2020.

China firmly opposes double standards on counterterrorism: Mao Ning

BELJING (APP): China on Wednesday said it firmly opposed double standards on counterterrorism as terrorism was humanity's common enemy. Chinese Foreign Ministry's Spokesperson Mao Ning was responding to a question about the surrender of a Baloch National Army commander to the Pakistani Government, who had disclosed that India had been secretly supporting terrorist activities and financing separatist forces in Balochistan. The spokesperson, during her regular weekly briefing, said that China had noticed relevant reports. "China stands for strengthening counterterrorism cooperation among all countries to jointly fight all forms of terrorism," she added. "To support and use terrorist groups and let them



thrive out of one's selfish interests at the expense of international and regional security benefits no one and will only backfire," the spokesperson said. It may be mentioned that the foreign media quoting Balochistan Government officials also reported that India's support and use of terrorists was the main reason behind the increasing terrorist activities in the province.

Ukraine Unveils 'Fastest' Kamikaze 'Mamai' Sea Drone Targeting Russian Black Sea Fleet

The Ukrainian kamikaze drone boat menace in the Black Sea is far from over. Kyiv's intelligence arm, Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), has unveiled a new killer Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV), the Mamai, billing it as the "fastest" remotely operated system in its unmanned strike inventory. Ukrainian security officials have claimed that there are plans to even strike the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) at Novorossiysk after it shifted there following the destruction of the BSF headquarters in September using air-launched Storm Shadow missiles. A Ukrainian news channel featured the Mamai while also interviewing Ukrainian defense industrial and defense authorities, who intriguingly claimed that the suicide USVs could also achieve many "strategic" tasks in Ukraine's war besides just being a "tactical" threat. Success on the sea is planned to be leveraged to impact land operations. This largely attests to prior EurAsian Times analysis about Ukrainian calculations and Washington's vision of reversing Russia's strategic gains in the war. The Mamai, like the Magura V that washed



ashore in Crimea, is sleeker with sharp features. It has a lone electro-optical (EO) system on the top hull, with a flat dish antenna – presumably a Starlink terminal. However, the nature of this feature is unclear, given Elon Musk's reluctance to be embroiled in a war with Russia. The report on the TCH channel claimed how the SBU "drove away the Russian fleet from (Ukrainian) shores" after hitting six Russian warships. They claimed this included missile carrier Samun, a Project 22160 Pavel Derzhavin large patrol corvette, a chemical tanker Sig, amphibious assault/landing ship Olenegorsky Gorniyak, navy tugboat Nikolay Mur, and a new reconnaissance ship Vladimir Kaztskyi (Vladimir Kozytskyi)."

Parasite Actor Lee Sun-kyun Found Dead in Apparent Suicide: Drug Scandal Overshadows Celebrated Career

Seoul (AFP): South Korean actor Lee Sun-kyun, best known for his role in the Oscar-winning film "Parasite", was found dead Wednesday in an apparent suicide, Yonhap news agency reported. The actor was discovered inside a vehicle at a park in central Seoul, Yonhap reported, citing police. Lee, 48, had been under police investigation over his alleged use of marijuana and other psychoactive drugs. Once celebrated for his wholesome image, local news outlets reported that the actor was being dropped from television and commercial projects following the scandal. A graduate of South Korea's prestigious Korea National University of Arts, Lee made his acting debut in 2001 in a television sitcom titled "Lovers". He later won acclaim for his performances in a variety of roles, including a charismat-

ic chef and a diligent architectural engineer who learns his wife cheats on him. Globally, he is best known for his portrayal of the wealthy and shallow patriarch in director Bong Joon-ho's 2019 Oscar-winning film "Parasite". His last film, this year's horror flick "Sleep" -- in which he played a husband whose sleepwalking eventually leads to horrifying circumstances -- was well-received critically and featured in the Critics' Week section at the Cannes festival. He briefly spoke to reporters in late October before entering an Incheon police station to meet with investigators. "I sincerely apologise for causing great disappointment to many people by being involved in such an unpleasant incident," he said at the time. "I feel sorry for my family, which is enduring such difficult pain at this moment."

Alabama Woman with Double Uterus Welcomes Rare Twin Girls

WASHINGTON (Agencies): In an extraordinary event, an Alabama woman with a congenital anomaly of having two uteri has given birth to healthy twin girls. Kelsey Hatcher and her husband Caleb celebrated the arrival of Roxi Layla on Tuesday night and her sister Rebel Laken on Wednesday morning at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital (UAB). Kelsey Hatcher, already a mother of five, has a unique condition known as a double uterus. Her pregnancy was extraordinary, as she carried a baby in each uterus, a medical rarity referred to as a dicavitary pregnancy, with odds as low as one in a million. Announcing the joyous occasion on Instagram, Kelsey shared, "Our miracle babies were born! They decided they were rare enough statistically that they should just go ahead and have their own birthdays too." Due to the high-risk nature of the pregnancy, Kelsey was induced at 39 weeks. After a combined 20 hours of labor, the twin girls were born. While the first baby arrived vaginally, in line with Kelsey's previous deliveries, the second baby was born via C-section.

Germany Procures Over 1,200 IRIS-T Missiles in Framework Agreement with Diehl Defence

BERLIN (Agencies): The Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology, and In-Service Support (BAAINBw) has entered a framework agreement with Diehl Defence for the procurement of more than 1,200 IRIS-T short-range air-to-air missiles for the German armed forces. The contract, signed on December 20, aims to meet the additional demand for the advanced IRIS-T missile, considered the world's most advanced short-range air-to-air missile. Diehl Defence leads the consortium responsible for the missile's development and production, with over 5,000 IRIS-T missiles delivered to the air forces of 12 nations since its introduction in 2005.

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- 100% Pure and Farm Fresh Whole Milk
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