

No immediate outcome from 'N'-PPP huddle

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) The first meeting between the ruling PML-N and its main ally PPP, held on Monday to address mounting differences between both sides remained inconclusive, with neither party releasing any information or press statement about the outcome of the engagement. The PPP issued a brief press release detailing the names of the members from both sides who attended the meeting held at the Governor's Annexe in Punjab House. The meeting was held to review the PPP's reservations regarding its representation in the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) and the lack of a level

playing field for the party's political activities in Punjab, which is governed by the PML-N. According to PPP sources, the party formally expressed its annoyance over the PML-N not taking coalition partners on board while making key policy decisions. Party leaders expressed particular concern over the practice of "hasty legislation" in parliament and categorically told the PML-N representatives that if they wanted continued cooperation from the party, they must change their attitude of taking coalition partners for granted. The issue of internet slowdowns also came under discussion, with PPP lead-

ers telling the government that such disruptions were affecting businesses in the country. They warned that if prompt measures were not taken to rectify the situation, future investments, particularly foreign investments, would be at risk. According to the sources, the PPP leaders also raised concerns about the proposed construction of six canals on the Indus River in Punjab's Cholistan area, saying the project would render lands in Sindh "completely barren". They drew the attention of the PML-N leaders to ongoing protests in various parts of Sindh against the project. A PPP leader, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the two

sides discussed political and legislative matters, including the contentious issue of water distribution among the provinces. The PPP leaders sought an explanation from the PML-N on where they would source water for the Cholistan canals. The PPP warned that this project could lead the country to ward a drought-like situation. The teams of both sides met under an assurance given by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar in a recent meeting with PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari to address the PPP's concerns. It was decided that the teams of both parties would hold regular meetings to resolve their differences.



Senator Zamir Hussain Ghumro presides over a meeting of the Senate Sub-Committee on Law and Justice on Dec 9, 2024.

Panel reviews bill to increase Balochistan's seats in Senate

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) A Senate committee on Monday discussed the bill to increase Senate seats for Balochistan and called the move necessary due to the province's vast size. The Senate Sub-Committee on Law and Justice, chaired by Senator Zamir Hussain Ghumro, convened at the Parliament House to review the Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2024. The bill has been introduced by senators Manzoor Ahmed and Danesh Kumar of Balochistan Awami Party to "enhance governance and ensure equitable representation for the province". The meeting on Monday was attended by senators Hamid Khan, Anusha Rahman, Mr Kumar and Ministry of Law and Justice officials. Senator Kumar highlighted the urgency of more Senate seats from Balochistan, stating that the issue has been under discussion for five years. He stressed that increasing the province's seats in the upper house of parliament from 65 to 80 would address Balochistan's multifaceted challenges. Senator Ghumro endorsed the proposal, emphasising the need for a "more inclusive representational model" for Balochistan.

SC questions rationale behind handing over May 9 cases to military courts



ISLAMABAD: (News desk) The Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court, hearing intra-court appeals (ICAs) against the Oct 23, 2023 order nullifying the trial of civilians by military courts, raised questions about whether anti-terrorism courts (ATCs) had issued speaking orders explaining their reasons before handing over the accused involved in the May 9 violence to military courts. "How did the ATC hand over the accused to the military?" asked Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan, a member of the seven-judge bench headed by Justice Aminudin Khan. The bench was hearing on Monday multiple ICAs challenging the five-judge's Oct 23 order that nullified the trial of civilians in military courts in connection with the May 9, 2023 violence.

Spat over registration of seminaries escalates

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Even as Maulana Fazlur Rehman continued to demand presidential assent for the recently-passed bill on seminary registration, the government on Monday — backed by members of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) — came out in opposition to the very piece of legislation it had passed, saying the draft had many flaws and should not be approved. At the 'Conference on Madrasah Registration and Reforms', held in sup-

port of the existing framework, ulema and government ministers contended that the current system of seminaries' registration should not be changed, and urged the federal government to maintain the status quo and not accede to the demands of the JUI-F chief. CII member Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi also presented a resolution at the conference, which was approved unanimously, demanding that the government of Pakistan maintain the current system of madrasah regis-

tration. The resolution called for consultation with the management of all madrasah boards before any new legislation in this regard. It also called for retaining the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE) and keeping seminaries linked with the country's education system. Issue at hand Under the Societies Act of 1860, religious seminaries were supposed to be registered by the relevant deputy commissioner's office. Traditionally, there were five seminary boards —

four belonging to the respective mainstream sects: Barelvi, Shia, Deobandi, and Ahle Hadith schools of thought, while the fifth board administered the affairs of seminaries under the control of the Jamaat-i-Islami. However, after three years of consultations following the 2014 Army Public School Peshawar attack, these five boards agreed with the government that seminaries should be placed under the administrative control of the Federal Education Department.



Council of Islamic Ideology member Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi addresses a conference, on Monday. Federal ministers Chaudhary Salik Hussain, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui and madrasah board members are also present.

FBR proposes 'one phone per person' limit for travellers

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Passengers arriving at Pakistan's airports should not be allowed to bring more than one mobile phone, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has proposed. Last week, the revenue body issued SRO 2028(I)/2024 of draft amendments to Baggage Rules, 2006 and sought opinions from stakeholders within a seven-day period, which ends on Dec 13. The FBR

has proposed amendments to the definition of "commercial quantity" in rule 2 to restrict the number and worth of items incoming passengers can bring into the country. Commercial quantity is defined as goods brought "for trading or pecuniary [monetary] purposes and not personal use. As per the draft amendments, the value of "commercial quantity" would be capped at \$1,200.

If the draft amendments are approved, goods worth more than \$1,200 would be considered "commercial quantity" and confiscated. Similarly, the draft amendment proposes allowing passengers to bring only one mobile phone, in addition to the one already in their personal use, from abroad. It suggested that any other mobile phones in their baggage be confiscated. Another amend-

ment proposes changes to the process of handling confiscated items. Earlier, commercial quantity goods seized by authorities were released after the payment of duties or fines. A document available on FBR's website currently states that commercial quantity goods would be released after the payment of a fine equal to 30 per cent of the value of goods in addition to duties and taxes.

Imran, Bushra testify in £190m Al-Qadir Trust case

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Former prime minister Imran Khan and spouse Bushra Bibi on Monday testified in the £190 million case, which pertains to the Al-Qadir Trust, with the PTI founder describing the corruption charges against him as 'politically motivated' orchestrated by his opponents allegedly with the support of state institutions. The case centres on the transfer of £190 million from the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) to Pakistan, in which it is claimed that the PTI founder and his wife illegally benefited through the Al-Qadir Trust. Mr Khan argued that the funds were transferred as part of an out-of-court settlement between the NCA and Malik Riaz's family, with no involvement or personal gain for him or his family. The PTI founder accused the ruling coalition and former military establishment of conspiring to remove him from power through a no-confidence motion in April 2022. He alleged that the subsequent corruption charges, including the current case, are part of a broader effort to tarnish his political career and dismantle the PTI.

Afghan diplomat, FM Dar discuss 'deep-rooted relations'

ISLAMABAD: (news desk) Pakistan and Afghanistan continued their renewed engagement on Monday, with Afghan Chargé d'affaires Sardar Ahmad Shakeeb meeting Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar to discuss bilateral ties. The Foreign Office (FO) issued a statement on the meeting noting that the two discussed the "deep-rooted ties" between the nations and agreed on the need to "strengthen mutually beneficial relations". This marks the second senior-level interaction in recent weeks, following a meeting between Pakistan's Chargé d'affaires in Kabul, Obaid Nizamani, and Taliban Defence Minister Mullah Yaqoob. The two sides look to be trying to mend ties that had been frayed by the use of Afghanistan soil by terrorists to carry out attacks on Pakistan. FO spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch at a media briefing last week said counterterrorism was the focus of Afghan talks. Reports suggest the Taliban may be relocating TTP fighters from border areas to Ghazni. Special Representative for Afghanistan Amb Mohammad Sadiq was also present in the meeting, while Sadiq and Shakeeb met separately as well. Later, the Afghan embassy in Pakistan said Shakeeb discussed issues pertaining to trade, problems faced by businessmen, regional

Lawmakers assail railway authorities for 'hiding' graft details

ISLAMABAD: (News desk) The Pakistan Railways came under sharp criticism at a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Railways on Monday due to repeated non-compliance with the committee's direction to disclose details of alleged mismanagement and corruption in one of the largest state-owned organisations. Due to continued lack of transparency, the committee referred the matter to the privilege committee which will now review whether the withholding of information constitutes a breach of parliamentary privilege. "It seems increasingly clear that the Pakistan Railways is deliberately withholding vital information from this committee," said the committee's chairman, Senator Saifullah Khan. There were sharp observations from lawmakers, particularly Senator Shahadat Awan who criticised the railway authorities' repeated failure to provide necessary information about actions taken against corruption, in the fifth consecutive meeting of the committee. He said the committee had previously set a deadline for the railway authorities to present details of the action taken against corruption, but the latter failed to comply with the directive.

Security forces kill 6 terrorists in KP, Balochistan

PESHAWAR / LAKKI MARWAT: (news desk) Six terrorists were killed, while a policeman embraced martyrdom, in gun battles and a bomb explosion in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan on Monday, the military and Levies said. Security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in the Kulachi area of Dera Ismail Khan district on the reported presence of terrorists from the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan

(TTP), a statement issued by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said. Security forces effectively engaged their location and killed two of them, while one was captured with injuries, adding that weapons and ammunition were recovered from them. According to ISPR, the outlaws were involved in terrorist activities against security forces, as well as targeted killing of innocent civilians. A sanitisation operation was being

conducted to eliminate any other militant found in the area, as security forces were determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country. Bannu clash Meanwhile, two militants were killed in a clash with the police about an hour after they targeted a cop near Kiri Bridge on Haved road in Bannu. Regional Police Officer Imran Shahid told journalists that two armed militants riding a motor-

cycle attacked Head Constable Ali Bahadar Khan while he was on his way to the cantonment police station for duty. He said the cop was critically wounded and was immediately shifted to DHQ Hospital, but he could not survive. Mr Shahid said the incident prompted swift and commandos of Quick Response Force (QRF) were sent to the area to chase the attackers and ensure their arrest. The regional police chief said that p



olice commandos came across the militants in the Miryan area, where an exchange of fire forced the attackers to abandon their motorcycle and take shelter inside a house. He said an additional force, including policemen from nearby police stations and counter-terrorism (CTD),