

QUETTA VOICE

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**Fafen says contr
oversies in Sindh LG polls
'do not augur well' for
general elections**



**JI hopeful PPP will
address its reservations
regarding Sindh LG polls**

Tourists throng towards Hanna Lake Quetta after snowfall

Syed Ali Shah
Manan Mandokhail

Hundreds of tourists including women and children thronged towards the beautiful Hanna Lake Quetta after the first snowfall of the winter season. Quetta and most parts of northern Balochistan received heavy snowfall and rainfall during the last two days. Snow and rainfall have turned the weather cold and people preferred to be confined to their homes.

However, once a deserted lake was filled with rain water after a long time and tourists rushed towards the site with its natural beauty. "We are here to enjoy the cold and pleasant weather", Muhammad Ajmal Kakar, a tourist from the Muslim Bagh area of the Killa Saifullah district said. Like Kakar, scores of tourists were roaming the lake to enjoy pleasant weather after the snowfall.

**Clean cold
water attracts
tourists**

Clean cold water attracts tourists from across Balochistan and other parts of the country. "I am coming here after five years", Arsalan, a young man from Karachi said. Arsalan had traveled from Karachi along with four other youngsters from Karachi to Quetta to witness the



snow and visit Ziarat and Hanna Lake. "We are planning to visit Ziarat tomorrow", Arsalan informed.

Mountains around Hanna Lake had worn a white carpet, which increased its natural beauty and attracted tourists from across the country. Images and videos of the lake filled with clean blue water went viral on social media. Crowds of tourists could be seen in the lake enjoying the first snowfall of the year.

**No basic
facilities at the
lake: Tourists
complain**

However, tourists complained about the lack of basic facilities inside the lake. "What a beautiful natural beauty but not a single facility", Muhammad Jaffar, another tourist from the Pishin district of Balochistan lamented. Jaffar had brought all family members in a van to witness Hanna lake filled with clean water after a long time. The British colonial rulers had constructed the Hanna Lake in 1894 to maintain the water table of Quetta, promote tourism, recharge ancient springs in the nearby mountains, and promote agriculture in the city. Migratory birds from Russian Syberia also used to come to the lake in the winter season. But that is no more the case because of hunting and lack of water in the lake.

Earthquake tremors felt in Kharan Balochistan

Muhammad Anjum

Earthquake tremors were felt in Kharan and adjoining areas on Thursday morning. However, no human or property loss was reported as a result of the earthquake tremors. The earthquake was recorded at 3.7 on the reactor scale. Its depth was 20 kilometers and its epic center was 28kms south of Kharan.

NA speaker defends decision to accept resignations of PTI lawmakers

National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervaiz notification of the members, mostly the top brass



Ashraf on Thursday defended his decision to accept the resignations of PTI lawmakers, saying he only did so after they were able to "satisfy him" by proving that it was a "voluntary decision and not under pressure". In an apparent bid to scuttle the PTI's purported plan to bring a confidence motion against Prime Minister Shehbaz Sha-rif, Ashraf on Tuesday had accepted the resignations of 34 PTI lawmakers alongside Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rashid, resulting in their de-notification by the Election Commission of Pakistan. The ECP communiqué regarding the de-

Balochistan Govt not in a position to pay salaries of employees: CM

Staff Reporter

QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Qudus Bizenjo on Wednesday said that the financial condition of the provincial government was serious and that it was not in a position to pay the salaries of the government employees. The CM has expressed serious concern over the prevailing financial crisis, an official handout issued here said.

**Official matters were
badly paralyzed because
of financial crisis**

He said official matters were badly paralyzed because of the prevailing financial crisis. He said that the federal government

was apprised of the financial position of the province. However, the federal government is yet to translate its words into action, he said.

**Government was
not in a position to
support flood-affected
people**

Mr. Bizenjo said the flood-affected people were in desperate need of support and that the provincial government was not in a position to support them due to the financial crisis. "We demand our fair share in the national finance commission award", he said.



**Balochistan had
already faced the
brunt of climate
change**

This situation has developed a sense of deprivation among the people of Balochistan, Mr. Bizenjo said. He said Balochistan had already faced the brunt of climate change and global warming and that the federal government should support all possible support to the provincial government in addressing the issues of the masses.

He reiterated the demand for the payment of outstanding the PPL share for Balochistan.

3 cops martyred in terrorist attack on Khyber checkpoint

Three police constables were martyred in a terrorist attack at a police checkpoint in Jamrud tehsil of Khyber tribal district on Thursday, police said.

The banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a statement, police said that unknown persons attacked the Takhta Beg police checkpoint at 7:30pm. The statement said the gunmen, armed with hand grenades, entered the premises and opened fire using a sub-machine gun.

The police statement said that after the firing, a suicide bomber blew himself up. "Three police constables have been martyred while reports of the injured have not yet been received," the statement said, identifying the deceased as Manzoor, Yunus and

Rafiq.

Speaking to Dawn.com, Khyber District Police Officer (DPO) Imran Khan said it was a "coordinated attack" during which the assailants opened fire and lobbed hand grenades while a suicide bomber was also present.

The DPO had earlier said that two police officials were martyred in the attack.

KP Chief Minister Mahmood Khan condemned the attack and sought a report from the provincial police chief. In a statement, he said he had directed police to send reinforcements.

"The sacrifices of the martyrs will not be in vain," he said.

Over the past few months, terrorism has been rearing its head again in the country, especially in KP and Balochistan. Pakistan has seen a rise in terrorist attacks

across the country, believed to have been planned and directed by the outlawed TTP leaders based in Afghanistan.

The TTP, which has ideological linkages with the Afghan Taliban, executed more than 100 attacks last year, most of which happened after August when the group's peace talks with the Pakistan government began to falter. The ceasefire was formally ended last year on Nov 28 by the TTP. Thursday's incident comes days after a senior police officer along with two constables embraced martyrdom in a mid-night militant attack on Sarband police station on the outskirts of Peshawar. Officials said the militants had carried out a "coordinated" attack and used advanced equipment, including thermal weapon sights. Web Desk

Fafen says controversies in Sindh LG polls 'do not augur well' for general elections

The Free and Fair Election Network (Fafen) said on Thursday that controversies regarding the quality of the electoral process in the recently held Sindh local government polls "do not augur well", especially when political parties are preparing for general elections.

In an observation report, Fafen noted that many controversies in the LG polls stemmed from weaknesses in the legislative framework that governed elections, adding that these needed to be



rectified through negotiations among all political actors.

"Unless elections lead to political stability, the process of democratisation will continue to

weaken and so will the public trust in democracy and its ability to improve the social and economic well-being of the people," the report said. At the same time, the

Election Commission of Pakistan needs to open up to political actors and address their legitimate concerns, the report added.

The report further noted that an "impressive number" of voters turned up in Badin, Jamshoro, Tando Muhammad Khan, Tando Allah Yar, Thatta, and Malir district while the turnout in Karachi Central, Karachi East, Karachi West, Karachi South, Korangi, Hyderabad, and Kemari districts was "relatively low". Web Dsk

JI hopeful PPP will address its reservations regarding Sindh LG polls

Jamaat-i-Islami's (JI) Hafiz Naeemur Rehman said on Thursday that he was hopeful the PPP, the ruling party in Sindh, would address the former's reservations about the recently held local government elections.

He made the remarks after meeting with a PPP delegation led by Saeed Ghani, who is also the provincial information minister.

The meeting came days after the JI chief levelled serious allegation of rigging against the PPP, which led Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah to contact him over the phone and assure him that legitimate concerns regarding the polls would be addressed.

It is pertinent to mention that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has taken notice of alleged irregularities in six union councils (UCs) amid accusations by JI emir Sirajul Haq and PTI chairman Imran Khan that the PPP used the Sindh government's resources to "manipulate the results".

At the outset of today's press conference in Karachi, Rehman said that recounting of votes was underway in some places, due to which problems were arising.

"We have forwarded our complaints regarding what happened on the day of the polls to the election commission. In some places, the presiding officer along with the ballot box were picked up."



He said that the main issue the party had was with obtaining the Form 11 and 12 and the subsequent "changing of the results".

"We contacted the election commission and also the PPP to resolve this matter." He noted that the ECP would hear the party's reservations regarding some UCs on January 23.

But UCs which are facing recounting issues [...] recounting is a legal process but if illegal moves are made during a legal process, then it makes the whole exercise fake [sic] which has happened in this case."

He further said that the party had informed the Sindh government and the PPP of its reservations regarding the LG polls. "I hope that Saeed Ghani bhai and his whole team will look at the issue and things will be resolved. We will wait and if things improve then there will be more talks."

For his part, Ghani congratulated the JI for securing a "good number" of seats during the LG polls. He said that the PPP had contacted the party in an effort to hear their reservations and complaints. "We have been saying for the past few days, since the results started coming in, that we want PPP and JI to work together in the city's local bodies. This is a good opportunity for this city, the people and the local bodies that two mature political parties work together to improve the situation." Web Desk

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Slow pace of development projects in Quetta

The pace of the development projects currently underway in Quetta is slow. Various suburbs of this provincial capital paints a bleak picture when it comes to development projects and the availability of basic facilities including water, education, health, road network, and sanitation.

Billions are pumped by the federal and provincial governments to bring this city at par with other developed parts of the country, but with no tangible results. For instance, the dualization of the Sabzal Road, Sariab Road is yet to be completed in spite of passing three years.

Sabzal Road is yet to be constructed. Former Chief Minister Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan inaugurated a portion of the Sabzal Road, which was really a good addition to the development and beauty of Quetta. However, a major portion of Sabzal Road is yet to be completed. Dirty water on the surface of the road and piles of garbage made peoples' lives miserable.

Residents of the area have made repeated appeals for immediate construction of the road. Chief Minister Mir Quddus Bizenjo has also visited the road and directed an early construction. Despite this all, the road is yet to be constructed. This actually exposes the bad governance in Balochistan.

Action should match the directives of the high-ups. Sariab Road and other ongoing development projects are also underway at a slow pace. Chief Secretary Balochistan, Abdul Aziz Uqaili visited various development schemes the other day and directed the concerned departments to ensure timely completion.

Action should match the directives of the high-ups. People are fed up with the ongoing slow-paced projects, which compound their problems. The provincial government should also share the volume of funds being spent on various development projects in Quetta with the media and people. This will improve transparency and accountability.

A viable master plan needs to be evolved to address the city's problems including an influx of people, new settlements, traffic, water, education and health problems.

Food Security for Pakistan

Salim Shah

National security cannot be guaranteed unless there is food security in Pakistan. Urgent attention needs to be given towards reforming and modernising the agriculture sector as well as controlling population growth.

This was the key message of the eminent speakers at the seminar on 'Food Security for Pakistan' organised by the Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS) in Islamabad.

Syed Fakhar Imam, Former Federal Minister, Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Government of Pakistan was the Keynote Speaker, while other eminent speakers included Dr. Abid Qayyum Suleri, Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad; Mr. Ashfaq Mahmood, Former Federal Secretary for Water and Power, Government of Pakistan; and Ambassador Shafiq Kakakel, Chairman Board of Governors, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad. The seminar was concluded by President CASS Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), while Dr Zia Ul Haque Shamsi Director at CASS moderated the proceedings.

Dr Zia Ul Haque Shamsi, while delivering the Opening Remarks,

highlighted that Pakistan being the fifth largest state in the world, and a predominantly agrarian-based society, unfortunately faces serious concerns of food insecurity for various reasons. This was especially concerning because while efforts were in hand to improve farming processes through modern methods, better seeds development, and resource management, Pakistan still had a long way to go in ensuring food security for its growing population at an affordable cost, he said.

In his Keynote Address on 'Role of Agriculture Sector and Food Security in Pakistan', Syed Fakhar Imam pointed out that national security, international security, and food security were all inter-linked and could not be divorced from each other. He lamented that of the five major crops, wheat was grown on 36% of the land which was where the problem lay. Sadly, Pakistan had failed to evolve high-yield crop varieties. Mr Imam argued that despite having five major agri-universities and affiliated colleges, they were not at par with international standards and had outdated curriculum. In his view, population explosion was also a major reason why Pakistan had become an importer of wheat. According to the speaker, mechanisation,

modernisation, agricultural extension, human resource development and research were key for strengthening the agroeconomy of Pakistan.

Dr. Abid Qayyum Suleri underlined that triple C Crises 'COVID, Conflict & Climate Change' were forcing states across the globe to question and rethink their healthcare systems, economic policies, and ways of producing and consuming food, but Pakistan, had tetra-C crises given its 'Complacency'. He pointed out that even before Pakistan's super floods and Russia-Ukraine war, the country was ranked 9th in the list of countries facing worst food insecurity. In his assessment, the Punjab Food Department released subsidised wheat to flour mills in April 2022, as opposed to its earlier policy of releasing the stocks in September, had resulted in the current wheat flour crisis as it allowed the private sector to hoard its reserves. Dr Suleri warned that future generations of Pakistan faced heightened risk of malnourishment, wasting, stunting as well as low IQ. He urged shifting to precision agriculture technologies; adopting climate-smart agri-practices; integrating social safety nets for farmers, including weather index based insurance; improving agri-institutional

arrangements; offering smart subsidies; and solarization of tube wells, among others.

While analysing the availability of water for agricultural needs, Mr Ashfaq Mahmood provided an overview of the water resources of Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty and trans-boundary waters. He informed that glaciers, snow melt, and rains were major sources of water for Pakistan. In his view, the effects of global warming and climate change had made it difficult to ensure sustainable water management in the country. He proposed increasing water storage capacity by building a combination of large, medium, and small dams; harvesting rainwater, particularly in barani areas; rationalising water withdrawals by provinces; conserving and recycling water; proactively addressing transboundary water issues; population control; desalinating sea water; and promoting information dissemination and rationalisation of virtual water.

Ambassador Shafiq Kakakel expressed disappointment that the problem in Pakistan was not the preparation of plans and projects rather lacked implementation as institutional arrangements for translating them into tangible actions was continuously

eroding. He warned that the cumulative effects of climate change would not just be on food security but would also increase poverty and slow down poverty eradication efforts. He advised adopting the perennial system of irrigation in the country.

While delivering the Concluding Remarks, Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd) thanked the speakers for their in-depth analysis of food security, especially its impact on Pakistan's security and socioeconomic development. He stressed that a malnourished population was vulnerable to exploitation by both internal and external adversaries and could not be expected to contribute to nation-building, hence, security of the state was being compromised. He urged that national security should define 'food security' as one of the vital national interests. President CASS recommended that in order to become self-sufficient, more research and development on modernising the agriculture sector and adopting new irrigation techniques was a need of the hour.

The seminar was attended by retired military officers, scholars from various think tanks, journalists and students, who actively participated in the interactive question and answer session.

A brighter future?

Sadly, the new year has brought us a literal cloud of murky gloom in Punjab and a more metaphorical mist in other parts of the country. Many wonder what the future is of a nation where the federal cabinet suggested at a pivotal meeting in Islamabad that 50 per cent of street lights be turned off and markets closed by 8:30pm. These may be useful measures, had our situation not been so critical.

The real problem is that Pakistan is faced with a massive economic crisis, unable to pay back debt and almost certainly doomed to go back to the IMF programme with all its many hardships for the ordinary people who are already struggling to survive. Even the middle class and upper middle class have been affected. The wealthy who remain untaxed because they are landowners or have enormous influence continue to live lifestyles of luxury.

But, somewhere, a glimmer of light does flicker. We have Pakistanis with clear ideas on how the economy of the country can still be salvaged at least over a period of time. There is no reason after all why Pakistan should be exporting fewer cotton products than Bangladesh. Dr Atif Mian argues that only an increase in exports combined with other measures can help rescue forex reserves and put the country back in a situation where it has the ability to sustain itself. The

more optimistic Dr Asim Ejaz Khawaja suggests that at the micro level steps are being taken by people such as the school teacher who holds additional classes each afternoon in an Islamabad park for children not going to school to remedy all that is wrong. His belief that education embraces the direction to a brighter future is a valid one and needs to be taken more seriously.

Rather than focusing primarily on religious education and the Single National Curriculum as is happening in Punjab, perhaps we need to see how we can enable lower level private schools to improve the quality of education they offer and thereby bring more people into a net where they can be truly productive citizens of a country seeking a path out of darkness. There is a need as persons of immense qualification who have chosen to remain in the country, and as people like Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy have suggested there is also a need to build on liberal education encompassing a more truthful assessment of our history alongside improving the teaching of science from school to university level.

The sad aspect of Pakistan is that too many of its younger people are essentially apolitical and of those who graduate from the best schools, most do not consider a future within the country. The collapse of the Pakistani passport as an instrument which can offer opportunity and

travel is just one factor. The state of the country and the widening idea that there is less and less hope, with the latest National Security Council meeting once again suggesting a hybrid dispensation was moving slowly into place, deepens this view. The reality is that 65 per cent of our population is aged under 30, with a large portion of it essentially apolitical, or apolitical until Imran Khan appeared on the scene backed by his powerful supporters in the mid-2000s. Since then, he has become a kind of cult figure looked up to as a hero with his misogyny, abusive language and obsession with corruption beyond all else taken on board.

But there are persons in the country who are able to retain rationality and a natural vision. They include people like Jibril Nasir, Ammar Ali Jan, Mohsin Dawar and others who could, notably if they were able to combine forces in some fashion, offer a different and brighter future to the country. This collection of people should also draw in individuals such as Maulana Hidayatullah of the Gawadar Haq Do Tehreek who has powerfully put forward the needs of the community and included a large number of women and people from the lowest income backgrounds in his effort.

Pakistan then is not without talent and not without ability. Even in the political landscape, we have individuals able

to put forward arguments that can offer hope and concern for the future. The performance of the team led by Sherry Rahman at the COP27 Summit is just one example of this. There are others and these individuals need to be utilized in the best possible way. The only manner to achieve this is to ensure that civilian politicians are able to progress and push forward democracy without intervention by other institutions. A huge amount of damage has been done in the past by institutions in this way. This cannot be repeated.

Of course, in our current situation we need good defence against both external elements and internal ones, such as the TTP and the Afghan Taliban. But to achieve this, we also need the goodwill of politicians across the board. Most importantly, we need to base leadership on merit and not dynasty. Yes, it is possible some dynasties in South Asia have produced superb leaders. But others too need to move into the political sphere.

Most importantly, we need ideological diversity. There is at the moment no real choice for voters in terms of what political parties have to offer. The demise of the Left began in Pakistan in the 1950s with the crackdown by Field Marshal Ayub Khan. It has continued since then. The partial revival of the Left in the early days of the PPP was crushed and trampled into the ground through the 1980s and the Zia era.

By Kamila Hyat

We need to give people back what it offered and allow them to make real choices. This could inspire younger people to think about their future in Pakistan and work towards a regeneration of the country.

We must remember that peasants as well as labourers and blue collar workers of all kinds form a large part of this population. So do women who constitute almost 50 per cent of the country's people. The fact that they do not reach the 50 per cent mark or a number slightly higher than this as is the case in other countries is simply a reflection on the way in which we treat, or rather mistreat girls and women. Women could play a huge role in bringing about economic development and also social change. We need both of these to go together if there is to be any hope for the future.

Pakistan is depending its economic policy on seeking handouts from China and notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This is not an effective way to run any state in the long term. New thought, new people and new ideas need to be injected into a static state structure and virtually immobile society so that differences can be made and we can step back from the abyss on the edge of which we currently stand and move towards a situation which at the very least puts us on par with other countries in the region and builds foundations for an even brighter future.

In memory of Latif Lala

By Mohsin Dawar

With the passing away of Advocate Latif Afridi, progressives and democrats have lost an important leader and one of the finest human beings we had. I have lost a great mentor and it is hard to find suitable words to pay tribute to this truly remarkable man or express my own pain in words.

Latif Lala, a progressive Marxist, had lived an extraordinary life of belief in the simple principle of fighting injustice. Given his legal and political struggle on the larger regional chessboard, he achieved more than could be expected of any man. I was privy to his thoughts and struggle as we navigated our legal and political trajectories, wrestled with an oppressive state, confronted the strategic policy in Afghanistan and the Pashtun tribal belt, took measure of the enforced disappearances in the country, overcame insurmountable odds to fight for the political rights of erstwhile Fata, responded to the self-defeating policies on terrorism and radicalization in Pakhtunkhwa, and relentlessly pursued democratic ideals.

In a securitized, extractive and oppressive system that has overseen grave injustices against certain communities or expropriated their resources, Lala emerged as a strong voice of the

voiceless. Where others feared to tread the difficult path, Lala never minced his words regarding oppression by the powerful, or in defence of individual liberty or rule of law. Deeply aware of the inherent dangers in exposing oppressors, he would always caution restraint for young activists; however, he himself was an epitome of courage when it came to such sensitive matters. Hardly anyone can match his legal struggle against enforced disappearances.

Despite massive pressure, he stood like a rock beside me during a particularly difficult time and led the panel of lawyers that represented me and others in court. In our quest to project a progressive and liberal voice in Pakistan's usual chaotic political landscape, he helped us lay the foundation of the National Democratic Movement.

Latif Lala was a consistent presence on Pakistan's national stage for over six decades. I am one of the countless thousands who drew inspiration from his courageous career. From my initial political engagement with him at the Pashtun Students Federation to my apprenticeship at his chamber to the establishment of the NDM, Lala was an unending source of inspiration and guidance. While he was instrumental in laying the foundation for the NDM, he demonstrated immense trust in me as

his student to lead the party. Inspiring a generation of lawyers, politicians, nationalists, social activists, progressives and youth, Lala commanded immense respect from all and sundry across the political divide.

While the world remembers him for his towering legal persona, behind that was a man who had a passion for indigenous culture, entertainment and extended immense respect to artists. I remember a man who was always absorbed in books and who had a wonderful sense of wit and a generous heart for his mentees. I remember a charismatic towering figure who always held his audience spellbound. Known for his mastery over the legal and the political, he was frequently consulted by younger politicians, activists, lawyers and others looking for sober analysis of the political, legal and regional developments in the country.

While we mourn the loss of one of the most sane, courageous and profoundly good human beings, we must ask ourselves one fundamental question: what shall we do to respond to the tasks of building a progressive and democratic society true to the ideals of democracy, rule of law and freedom from violence and terror? It falls to us as best as we can to forward the example that Latif Lala set.

Dreams and nightmares

By Murtaza Solangi

As we rise from a long, dusky slumber and look at ourselves after three quarters of a century, we find ourselves engulfed in multiple crises threatening our very existence today. Pakistan's crisis today, which is genuinely a polycrisis, looks like a tangled thread ball – and we need to find out what thread to pull to untangle it.

While at the heart of the crisis is the very structure of our state, (national security state), the economic, social and cultural policies pursued at home and the foreign policy executed abroad to strengthen the policies at home, seem to be the fountainhead of the polycrisis we face today.

As a consequence of those policies, we have arrived at this governance, economic, political, security and cultural collapse. We stand at the cusp of a failed state today.

The multiple experiments during the evolution of our post-colonial state – civil bureaucracy dominated to military bureaucracy led, direct martial laws followed by a brief civilian supremacy of ZAB, the troika brand hybrid model of the 1990s, the new hybrid variant from 2008 to 2018 and the 2018-2022 hybrid of the hybrid – have created the polycrisis we face today.

True, economic default stares us in the face today. We are where we are not because of the eight months or, for that matter, the policies of the last four years or the policies of the hybrid of the hybrid regime of Imran Khan. We are here

because of the economic policies of many, many decades of all the models that have ruled the roost.

We may resume in the IMF programme and might get a dole out and a few more loans from friendly countries but continuing the economic policies of the past will push us where we might end up as a friendless country with no future.

The current coalition leadership has a daunting challenge in front of them. They can get out of the kitchen if it is too hot, but they would also have to take the responsibility for getting into the kitchen in the first place. The second option is even more challenging. They can also opt for laying the foundation for the much-needed reforms and include those reforms in their election manifestos.

The current taxation system is predatory. It spares the evaders and punishes the payers and is bringing economic collapse. It is not sustainable.

The historical choking of the civilian institutions by the establishment has created the current mess we are in. Although there was an admission by the former COAS and the reiteration not to pursue the policies of the past, we shall see how that resolve is put into practice by the current leadership. Ronald Reagan once said: Trust but verify.

The country must switch from a geoeconomic to a geo-economic vision, resolving some and putting on the back-burner some with our neighbours to promote regional trade and better

economic ties. The political class and the establishment must agree to an economic vision for the country and ensure political stability, following the rules of the game and saying farewell to political engineering. If we don't do it, we will sooner rather than later end up as a failed state. A nuclear armed failed state with multiple ethnic, religious, social and class fault lines will be more catastrophic than Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya and Rwanda, all rolled into one.

More than holding early, on-time or delayed elections, the national consensus on the economic, political and foreign policy for the future is important. Regardless of the shenanigans of Imran Khan and his anarchist policies and actions since his dismissal from power in April last year, no political stability will be achieved if there is no consensus on the big ticket items for the future. Without that consensus, the elections will only act as a catalyst for Armageddon.

Much has been said during each crisis that we can't have a reform agenda during the crisis. That is how we have added a new crisis each time into the polycrisis we face today.

The history of the struggling nations that have overcome such crises says it loud and clear that they succeeded only because their leadership pulled up their socks and made tough and serious decisions in tough and serious times.

A country of 220 million mouths can't be fed,

looked after, educated, skilled and brought to compete with the comity of nations with no investment in its educational and healthcare systems and with a broken political system, badly bruised and battered over many decades of political engineering and rule of the jungle.

Small islands of affluence for the privileged powerful elites and vast oceans of poverty can't coexist forever.

For three quarters of a century, the ruling classes of this country have taken its people and their ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity as a liability and dragged us into the royal mess we are in today. Realizing their diversity and potential as an asset shall set us free.

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Bureaucratic varsities

By Dr Faizan Naqvi

Public-sector universities are the only hope of those from the middle class for a better future in Pakistan. However, across Pakistan, varsities are facing financial cuts and their autonomy is continuously impeded by predatory governments.

University of Karachi, one of the biggest and oldest varsities, is worst affected. Catering to 40,000 students and more than 50 disciplines this once-topnotch university is going through a brain drain. Unending delays in the process of hiring and promoting faculty members take six to eight years to complete while other universities in Sindh take between six months and a year to do the same.

Underfunding, lack of accountability and disregard of standards allow bureaucratic delays, frustrating KU faculty that now stands at the brink of disorder. Faculty with over 25 years of service are retiring as assistant professors.

Attempts were made to reform governance and the Sindh Universities Amendment 2018 simplified the process of recruitment but

Karachi University continues without policy reforms. Over 400 faculty members applied for the next cadre in 2019, scores have retired and hundreds will superannuate in next five years but are denied the right to present their case to the Selection Board. Recently Dr Zafar Iqbal of Environmental Sciences retired after 25 years of service as assistant professor despite a court order to hold his Board. Similarly, Dr Ameer Ahsan of Pharmacy is to retire in October after serving Baqai, Ziauddin and lastly Karachi University while waiting for a Board.

Universities only need to follow the University Act that requires three experts with eight board members to select a suitable candidate. Instead Karachi University allows deans, chairpersons, foreign expert reports and secretary boards and universities to further the red-tape in the process.

The University of Karachi needs an overhaul of the existing bureaucratic mindset and to get rid of the assumption that red-tape is a substitute for standards. Discrimination against varsities and within a varsity must end by

following same procedures of hiring.

As reported in this paper recently, KU faculty members have extended their protest from demonstrations to a hunger strike onto death. This escalation not only highlights the sense of frustration amongst the faculty but also shows the blatant disregard for faculty by the KU administration and the Sindh government. The protesting faculty say this is the time for policy reforms that abolish the hindrances and speed up the already delayed processes.

Varsities should be a benchmark for academic standards, hubs of knowledge, and arenas for debate and disagreement with a sense that changing the world is possible. Instead, the varsity bureaucracy has abandoned research and replaced it with a business sense where research culture is shamelessly suppressed and denied official support and the only function of the administration is to ensure salaries.

When teachers turn to hunger strikes to press for their demands, society at large must acknowledge its disbelief at the state of affairs of what should have been a centre of excellence.

ECP likely to release schedule for by-polls on 34 NA seats next week

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is likely to release the schedule for by-polls on 35 National Assembly (NA) vacated by PTI lawmakers next week.

According to sources, the ECP has decided to hold by-polls on 35 NA seats and schedule for by-elections will be released next week. The decision was taken in an ECP meeting held in Islamabad, say sources. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) recently denotified 35 Members of the

National Assembly (MNAs) of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) after the NA speaker accepted their resignations.

The denotified PTI lawmakers include Asad Umar, Asad Qaiser, Pervez Khattak, Murad Saeed, Imran Khattak, Shehryar Afridi, Ali Amin Gandapur, Noorul Haq Qadri, Raja Khurram Nawaz, Ali Nawaz Awan, Sadaqat Ali Khan, Ghulam Sarwar, Sheikh Rashid Shafiq, Mansoor Hayat Khan, Fawad Chaudhry, Sanauallah Khan, Hammad Azhar,

Shafiqat Mahmood, Malik Amir Dogar, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Zartaj Gul, Faheem Khan, Saifur Rehman, Alamgir Khan, Ali Zaidi, Aftab Siddiqui, Ataullah Khan, Aftab Jahangir, Muhammad Aslam Khan, Najeeb Haroon, Qasim Suri and others.

Moreover, PTI MNAs on reserved seats including Aliya Hamza Malik and Kanwal Shauzab were also denotified. In July last year, NA Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf had accepted the resignations of 11 PTI MNAs. INP

Climate change addressed to facilitate Pakistan's post-disaster reconstruction

BEIJING: Co-hosted by China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF) and Pakistani Embassy in China, a launch ceremony for a series of charity events was held online.

During the event, Pakistani Ambassador to China, Moin ul Haque, emphasized the urgency for proactive climate action and international cooperation to mitigate the effects of climate change, according to Gwadar Pro.

Since mid-June, over 33 million people in Pakistan have been affected by unprecedented rains and devastating floods across the country, leaving millions of people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

"This catastrophe was indeed unprecedented in its scale and its magnitude. However, the outpouring of international sympathy and support during these difficult times was very heart warming.

A manifestation of this was the recent Climate Resilient Pakistan conference in Geneva, where we saw strong support and solidarity of international

community with Pakistan," said Haque.

China has always been a very strong supporter and partner of Pakistan. China was among the foremost countries to announce the assistance package and one of the largest donors today," Haque expressed his gratitude and called for Chinese friends from all walks of life to help suffering people in Pakistan, and help them to reconstruct their homes and rehabilitate their lives.

While addressing the campaign in order to raise awareness of enhancing climate resilience through global cooperation and promote cultural exchanges, Dr. Zhou Jinfeng, Secretary-General of CBCGDF, reiterated the importance of global cooperation in creating an ecological civilization for a shared future.

"Climate change is a global threat nowadays. Over the past 200 years, the development pattern of human industrial civilization has caused global warming and eventually led to many disasters, including the floods in Pakistan.

Everyone of us has the obligation and

responsibility to work together to mitigate the negative effects of climate change," said Zhou.

"We humans live in a shared future. We are helping Pakistan restore its soil and habitat after the disaster, which is also rebuilding the resilience of our planet and human habitat," added Zhou.

In his remarks, Vanno Noupech, UNHCR's Representative in China, said that climate change was aggravating displacement, worsening poverty, food insecurity, water shortages, and access to natural resources that communities rely on for survival.

He also appreciated Pakistan's generosity providing humanitarian assistance and protection to millions of refugees and highlighted the need for international solidarity in tackling climate change.

International organizations, Chinese think tanks, NGOs, and members of youth leagues attended the event, urging proactive action to mitigate the effects of climate change and support Pakistan's reconstruction after last summer's devastating floods. INP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication, Syed Amin Ul Haque pressing button to launch 'AI powered Career Counselling Portal'.

Govt recorded its apprehensions before LHC regarding Toshakhana gifts

LAHORE: The government on Thursday recorded its apprehensions before the Lahore High Court (LHC) regarding Toshakhana gifts stated that public disclosure of such articles could cause "unnecessary media hype, which might be potentially damaging to the interests of Pakistan in the conduct of international relations".

The concern was raised by the government in its report submitted before the single-judge bench during the hearing of a petition seeking to make records of Toshakhana gifts public. The petition was filed by a private citizen Munir Ahmad through advocate Azhar Siddique in December 2022.

Established in 1974, the Toshakhana is a department

under the administrative control of the Cabinet Division and stores precious gifts given to rulers, parliamentarians, bureaucrats, and officials by heads of other governments and states and foreign dignitaries. The department has been in the news in recent days in light of proceedings against former prime minister Imran Khan for "not sharing details" of Toshakhana gifts. According to Toshakhana rules, gifts/presents and other such materials received by persons to whom these rules apply shall be reported to the Cabinet Division. Justice Asim Hafeez of the LHC conducted the proceedings, while Additional Attorney General Nasar Ahmed turned up on behalf of the government today. At the outset of

the hearing, Ahmed apprised the court of a written response submitted by the government to the court detailing Toshakhana rules along with its disclosure policy. In its three-page response, the government said: "The Toshakhana was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Cabinet Division in 1973 under Schedule-II of the Rule of Business, 1973. The gifts deposited in Toshakhana of Cabinet Division are governed under the 'Procedure for Acceptance and Disposal of Gifts', amended from time to time. Lastly, the Procedure was amended in the year 2018 whereby the retention cost of the gift(s) was enhanced from 20 per cent to 50pc of the assessed value." INP

ECP decides to notify Imran's win on 7 NA seats

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday decided to confirm Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chief Imran Khan's success in seven constituencies of the National Assembly in the by-elections held on October 16, 2022.

The ECP had previously reserved its decision as Imran had failed to submit the details of expenses he had incurred in the by-elections.

The PTI chief had not submitted the election expenditure details within the stipulated time for the seven seats: NA 22, NA 24, NA 31, NA 45, NA 108, NA 118 and NA 239.

According to the law, details of the poll expenses must be submitted to the electoral watchdog within three days after the date of the election. Several candidates have been disqualified in the past for not submitting details of election expenses and the Supreme Court had also barred the losing candidates from contesting the next election. However, following the submission, the details of Imran Khan's election expenses were approved and the ECP today issued a notification confirming Imran's victory in all the seven seats he had won in the by-elections last year.

Out of the eight National Assembly seats previously held by the PTI, Imran had contested on seven, while Meher Bano Qureshi was to defend the party's bastion in Multan. However, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) made inroads, with Hakeem Baloch winning in Karachi and Ali Musa Gilani in Multan.

According to the by-election results, Imran won the NA seats from Mardan, Charsadda and Peshawar in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Faisalabad and Nankana Sahib in Punjab and the Korangi district of Karachi in Sindh. INP

Maryam Nawaz will return on January 29: Safdar

LAHORE: PML-N vice president Maryam Nawaz will return Pakistan from London on January 29, her spouse Captain Safdar Awan confirmed on Thursday. Maryam will land at Lahore airport on 4:00pm on Sunday January 29, Safdar said.

"Intervention in politics has inflicted irreparable loss to the country," he said. "Ex-COAS's intervention caused flour shortage in country," Capt. Safdar said. "Pervez Musharraf's intervention inflicted irreparable loss to the country," he said. "We will expose those judges and generals, who pushed Pakistan to the existing situation," Safdar said. "Maryam Nawaz will return to Pakistan to expose those who had conspired against Pakistan," he added.

According to earlier reports, PML-N activists have started preparations for warm welcome of Maryam Nawaz on her returning back to the country. Captain Safdar Awan has started mobilization of the party workers and contacting other party leaders.

Earlier, Punjab governor Balighur Rehman said in a statement that former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is returning to Pakistan next month while Maryam is also arriving soon. It is pertinent to mention here that Maryam Nawaz has left for London in October last year after getting her passport back from the Lahore High Court (LHC). INP

SHC hears MQM-P's plea against 90,000 Govt jobs

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) on Thursday heard Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan's (MQM-P) plea against the recruitment of 90,000 vacancies in the province.

At the outset of the hearing, Justice Junaid Ghaffar asked the MQM-P's counsel why they are in hurry on the matter. Process for recruitment has begun, the counsel replied after the SHC bench query and added that recruitment by the SIBA is 'illegal'. The court accepted the plea for an immediate hearing.

Earlier, Sindh High Court Sukkur Bench ordered to stop the recruitment process of Primary School Teachers (PST) and Junior Elementary School Teachers (JEST), who secured less than 40 percent marks in the test conducted by Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Sukkur.

A two-member bench of the Sindh High Court Sukkur bench comprising Justice Sallaluddin Panhwar and Justice Abdul Mobin Lakho. INP



FAISALABAD: District and session Judge Khalid Bashir addressing during annual general meeting of district bar, in the city.

Chairman NDMA terms Think Tank, Emergencies Operations Centers to be cornerstone of remodeled framework

ISLAMABAD: Chairman National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Lieutenant General Inam Haider Malik has said that National Disaster Management Think Tank and Emergencies Operations Center would be cornerstone of remodeled framework to transform climatic emergency response from reactive to proactive mode.

He was presiding over an interactive session of NDMA with Humanitarian Partners at National University of Science & Technology (NUST) on Thursday. The session was participated by members of Pakistan Humanitarian Forum (PHF) and National Humanitarian Network (NHN) as well as representatives of international NGOs.

The session was aimed at strengthening coordination & collaboration across the disaster man-

agement cycle with focus on disaster risk reduction for combating the vulnerabilities of natural hazards. It also discussed the key identified areas pertaining to implementation of climate resilience and adaptation in Pakistan.

Chairman NDMA shared the Remodeled National Preparedness & Response framework with participants. He also underlined the need of technology-based early warning system, common operating picture for early warnings and conducting simulation exercises to mitigate the impact of natural calamities.

He laid stress on multi-sectoral need assessment survey during pre-disaster phase and strengthening of District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) to protect vulnerable groups from adverse impact of disaster. At humanitarian front, he called for coordination

among NGOs/INGOs with National Volunteers to steer disaster management and response in the country.

Participants appreciated the determination of NDMA to synergize efforts and organize dialogue with academia and relevant stakeholders for active participation for remodeling of disaster management in Pakistan. Representatives of NGOs/INGOs & Academia drew attention on various issues related to administration, disaster mitigation & compounding approaches, allocation of resources and project funding for academic researchers in field of disaster management.

Lt. Gen. Inam Haider acknowledged the observations and assured that recommendations from this session would be taken into fold of Remodeled framework for National Preparedness & Response system. INP

Delay in repair of blasted pipeline, various areas of Balochistan witness low gas pressure

BOLAN: Various areas of Balochistan province witness low gas pressure issue due to delay in repair of the gas pipeline blasted by the militants.

According to details, militants had blown 12 inch gas pipeline in Sirajabad area of Bolan through remote-controlled device resultantly 100 feet pipeline was affected. A case was registered against unidentified culprits at CTD police station in Dhadar.

Sui Southern Gas Company team visited the site of the blast but due to delay in repair work, gas pressure in Quetta, Mach, Pishin, Ziarat, Kalat and Mastung was reduced to zero. INP

Parvez Elahi demands massive seat adjustment from PTI for merger

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), has demanded seat adjustments in Gujrat, Chakwal, and Gujranwala divisions from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the upcoming general elections.

According to sources, the PML-Q has expressed interest in forming an alliance with the PTI, but only on the condition of seat adjustments.

The Punjab CM has also requested a written agreement over the seat adjustment with PTI leader Imran Khan.

However, senior leaders within the PTI have opposed Elahi's demands for half of the seats in the mentioned divisions.

Elahi has stated that without any significant political benefit, the PML-Q will not unite with the PTI. INP



ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, addressing a press conference at a local hotel in Federal Capital.

Pakistani rupee goes down again against US dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistani rupee suffered a fresh blow against the US dollar on Thursday amid reports the World Bank has deferred approval of two loans worth \$1.1 billion for the country.

As the interbank markets opened, the rupee went down - 22nd drop in a row - against the greenback which was now being traded at Rs229.

On Wednesday, the local currency depreciated 0.11% in the interbank market, declining by 25 paisas to close the day at 228.91.

The dull interbank business is lacking direction amid reports

the government is considering new tax-raising measures through a Presidential Ordinance that may include an increase in the rates of withholding taxes, more indirect taxation, three percent flood levy on imports, and tax on banks' foreign exchange income.

The move comes as Pakistan mobilises revenue in an effort to revive the stalled International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme.

The World Bank was quick to react, deferring its approval of two loans for Pakistan worth \$1.1 billion until the next fiscal year pending

some steps on the country's energy debt and tariffs.

The funds were to be provided for two projects including Resilient Institutions for Sustainable Economy (RISE-II) and Program for Affordable and Clean Energy (PACE-II).

World Bank was due to give Pakistan \$450 million for RISE-II and \$600 million for PACE-II. However, it has now deferred the disbursement until the next fiscal year.

The bank also opposed the 1%-3% flood levy on imports to fulfill the financing gap of \$32 billion. INP

Turkish, Saudi investors visit Gwadar Free Zone

ISLAMABAD: In a major development, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are mulling significant investments in the Gwadar Free Zone (North) with a magnitude of incentives as well as conducive business and trade activities in 2023.

GPA official told Gwadar Pro that a representative of Turkish multinational corporation Nysan is visiting Gwadar Port on 18th January (Wednesday) with an objective to seek commerce & trade opportunities and potentials of

establishing a warehouse in the Free Zone.

Nysan Industrial Technology Group is a leading brand from Turkey operating globally. The Nysan Group deals in tyres, lead acid batteries, auto spare parts, CNC robotic machinery, lubricants and filters.

Gwadar port which serves the primary purpose of transshipment offers lucrative prospects to potential investors.

Another group consisting of senior office bearers of the Pakistan-Saudi Business Chamber,

Lahore chamber and Pakistan Transport Council are also visiting on Wednesday. Their main purpose of the visit is to explore the sound viability of joint ventures in a wide range of businesses including petrochemical.

GPA official said that Gwadar has many charms as it offers enormous business opportunities for both local and foreign Potential Investors.

"The key industries suited Gwadar include port-centred service industries such as fishery, petrochemical industry,

tourism, trade logistics and port-centred processing and manufacturing industries such as assembling of oil storage, refining, transport equipment, ship breaking, food & building materials processing, home appliances manufacturing electronics and information industry," he added. Recently many foreign diplomats visited Gwadar including German ambassador in Pakistan Alfred Grannas, Karachi German Consulate Consul General Dr. Rüdiger Lotz. Meanwhile British

Deputy High Commissioner and Director Trade for Pakistan Sarah Mooney also paid a 2-day visit to Gwadar. She also interacted with traders and members of the Gwadar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, praising Gwadar's development model. Last year in September a team of Canada's Barrick Gold Corporation, headed by Michael Peter Nelson, arrived in Gwadar and showed an interest in making investments in the import and export of different minerals. INP



ISLAMABAD: Chairman NDMA Lt General Inam Haider Malik presiding during interactive session with NGOs and INGOs.

Envoy Masood Khan stresses tech sector linkages with Irvine, California

WASHINGTON DC: Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, Masood Khan has said that Punjab-California Sister Province Agreement provides a model to establish domain-specific state-to-province, city-to-city economic linkages between Pakistan and the United States.

While talking to Irvine Mayor Farrah N. Khan, an American of Pakistani descent, he said, "The tech-startups of Pakistan, manned by enterprising youth, and a vibrant tech sector of Irvine, California, could forge strong partnerships for not only meeting the economic needs of the two sides but also to strengthen people-to-people exchanges."

Speaking during the meeting with the Ambassador, Ms. Farrah Khan during said that Irvine is rated as one of the top ranking cities of the United States for start-up businesses, strong economy and a growing job market. It's worth mentioning here that Mayor Farrah Khan is serving her second tenure as the representative of one of the economic hubs of the United States.

Masood Khan, while congratulating on her successful political career, said that her leadership qualities and successes make Pakistan and Pakistani diaspora in the United States proud. He said that Pak-origin Americans, who

have excelled in their respective areas, were not only an asset for Pakistan but an abiding link between Pakistan and the United States.

Referring to his recent visit to California and signing of Punjab-California sister state-province agreement, the Ambassador termed the development as historic which would bring Punjab, the largest populated province of Pakistan, and state of California, the largest state of the US, closer and would open up vistas for enhancing economic interaction between the two countries.

Ms. Farrah Khan thanked the Ambassador for warmly receiving her and highlighted tech, meditech and artificial intelligence as the major sectors where Irvine was witnessing significant progress.

Higher education and advanced learning in the latest technologies was another promising area for enhancing mutual collaboration, she said. Farrah Khan also highlighted the valuable contributions being made by Pakistani diaspora towards socio-economic development of Irvine and the state of California.

The Ambassador invited Mayor Farrah Khan to visit Pakistan along with a business delegation for promoting cooperation between chamber and industry and to strengthen people-to-people linkages. INP



KARACHI: Leader of Pakistan Peoples Party Saedd Ghani addressing a press conference along with Leader of Jamaat-e-Islami Hafiz Naem Ur Rehman after the meeting with PPP and JI leaders at Idara Noor-e-Haq in Provincial Capital.

Households, edibles burnt to ashes in T.T. Singh fire incidents

PIR MAHAL: Households and edibles valuing millions of rupees were burnt to ashes in separate fire incidents in Toba Tek Singh on Thursday.

Fire caused due to electric short circuit engulfed a general store located in Ghousia Abad area of Toba Tek Singh resultingly huge quantity of edibles were burnt to ashes.

In Nazir Park locality of Pir Mahal in district Toba Tek Singh, fire initiated due to short circuit in security camera engulfed a house. Fire gutted entire household before it could be doused.

Teams of rescue 1122 rushed the scene of incidents and extinguished the fire. However, no casualties were reported during the incidents. INP

Court sends back Thatta water supply reference against Zardari to NAB

ISLAMABAD: The accountability on Thursday sent back the Thatta water supply reference against former president Asif Ali Zardari to the National Accountability Bureau, ARY News reported.

The court announced its verdict reserved in the Thatta water supply reference. Accountability Judge Rana Nasir sent back the reference to the NAB as "the case does not come in the jurisdiction of the court".

The court has directed the accountability watchdog to refer the reference to a concerned forum.

The accountability court had earlier reserved its verdict over the acquittal plea of former president Asif Ali Zardari in the case.

As per details, the accountability court judge Nasir Javed hear the acquittal plea in the Thatta water supply case.

It is pertinent to note here that the anti-graft body had nominated Zardari, Ejaz Ahmed Khan, and 12 other suspects in the supplementary reference filed in connection with Thatta water supply scam. The bureau had not nominated Zardari in the interim reference. INP

Kashmiri will observe Indian Republic Day as Black Day

MUZAFFARABAD: Chairman Pasban-e-Hurriyat Uzair Ahmad Ghazali has said that so-called Republic Day of India will be observed as black day throughout Azad Kashmir to expose Indian war crimes to the world.

In a statement issued to the media here on Thursday, he appealed the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Kashmiri living around the world to observe January 26th as black day and organize protest processions to expose real face of India.

"The protest will be held at Burhan Wani Chowk on January 26 at 10 am where black flags will be hoisted and citizens will march on the main highway" he informed. INP

Pakistan, China agreed to temporarily reopen Khunjerab border: FO

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China have agreed to temporarily reopen Khunjerab border in two phases. In the first phase, the Khunjerab border will open for two days and again from end January to early February after the Chinese Spring Festival.

Foreign Office (FO) Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch has stated this during weekly news briefing in Islamabad on Thursday.

She said the Khunjerab border remains closed during the winter months. However the Chinese side has agreed to Pakistani request for temporary reopening of the border to facilitate local traders. We appreciate the special efforts of border officials on both sides to ensure smooth border operations despite inclement weather conditions.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will undertake an official visit to Tashkent, Uzbekistan on 25th of this month to attend the 26th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Economic Cooperation Organization. INP

LHC approves protective bail of Shahbaz Gill

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) has approved the protective bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Dr Shahbaz Gill.

The LHC approved protective bail of Dr Shahbaz Gill till January 24 besides ordering the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to provide copies of all cases against the PTI leader.

The LHC's Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh heard the bail plea of Dr Gill. The PTI leader appeared in the hearing in a wheelchair.

The lawyer stated that a new case was registered against Gill by the FIA. He said that Gill is likely to be arrested again in the new case, on the other hand, the

agency was not providing the details of the cases.

Shahbaz Gill through his counsel sought protective bail from the high court.

The deputy attorney general apprised the LHC that a new case was registered against the PTI leader, however, he was unaware of the First Information Report's (FIR) number.

After listening to the arguments, Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh approved the protective bail of Gill till January 24 and ordered him to submit surety bonds worth Rs50,000.

The court ordered the agency to provide copies of the cases against Gill and adjourned the hearing. INP

Pakistan, Russia agree to enhance cooperation in diverse fields

ISLAMABAD: The Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) of Pakistan and Russia on Thursday continued deliberations and reached an agreement to form working groups and further the existing cooperation between the two countries in diverse fields including energy, oil and gas.

The 8th three-day meeting of the IGC, which started here on Wednesday, reviewed the areas of cooperation and looked into ways and means of exploring new opportunities for strengthening bilateral relations.

Experts of the two countries held technical sessions and debated on possibilities to further deepen bilateral cooperation in trade and investment; agriculture; energy;

industry; education; science and technology; information and communication technologies; finance, customs and communication, besides roads, postal service and railways.

The Russian side observed that the energy sector was the main focus because its Energy Minister Nikolai Shulginov was himself leading the negotiations.

The two sides have decided to move forward together in the field of energy, and Pakistan would get the benefit of Russian expertise in the oil and gas sector.

The visiting delegation also suggested Pakistan take benefit of Russia's expertise in the field of science & technology and research. INP

Pakistan urges UNSC to act 'swiftly, resolutely' to end Israel's rights abuses in Palestine's occupied lands

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan Wednesday called on the Security Council to act "swiftly and resolutely" to bring a halt to a host of Israel's human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory and continuous provocations at the sacred Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and ensure its compliance with International law, and implement the resolutions on the Middle East conflict.

Speaking in the 15-member Council's debate on the situation in the Middle East, Ambassador Munir Akram said that the two-State formula, envisaging establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, offers the only solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"The rising extremism in Israeli leadership must not be allowed to foreclose this solution," the Pakistani envoy said, referring to the new Israeli extreme right-wing government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"There is no question in anybody's mind that Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian lands – the seizure of land and properties for Israeli settlements; the violence against unarmed Palestinian children, women and men; the blockade of Gaza; and the desecration of Holy Al-Aqsa – are of all grave violations of Security Council resolutions and international law, including humanitarian law," Ambassador Akram added. INP

Investment Readiness Conference for KP Integrated Tourism Zones held

ISLAMABAD: An Investment Readiness Conference for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZs) was held here at a local hotel in Islamabad on Thursday.

Investment Conference on 'Integrated Tourism Zones in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa' (ITZ) was organized to mobilize private sector investments and promote responsible tourism. This is for the ITZs in Mankyal, Swat and Ganoor, Manshera. The event was attended by a huge number of national-level investors. Presidents of ICCI, RCCI, representatives of PTDC, KP-BOIT and other trade associations were also present.

The ITZs is a maiden concept in Pakistan which aims to open a new destination in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to promote responsible tourism by suggesting diversity and quality in the tourism offering of these destinations and provide guidance for tourist planning and destination management activities.

ITZ feasibility and master plans were prepared by the KP's Department of Tourism (DoT) through the World Bank-sponsored Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Integrated Tourism Development (KITE) project with the support of international experts over a period of one year. The provincial authorities and other speakers shared the opportunities for private sector investments with the participants.

As part of this exercise, customized plans for each destination have been prepared and will be used to invite investments from the private sector. It is expected

that this approach to destination management will lead to an improved visitor experience, better regulation of sites and mobilization of resources from the private sector for the identified investments.

Director General KP Culture and Tourism Authority (KP CTA) Muhammad Bakhtiar Khan in his keynote address stated "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is well positioned as a preferred tourism destination in Pakistan – it has a considerable competitive advantage due to the natural endowments and a culture of hospitality. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is not only focusing on creating employment opportunities by promoting tourism activities but also making efforts to conserve natural and cultural assets by promoting responsible tourism in the province.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism Department/ KP CTA is committed to its objective of making the province a preferred tourist destination. Efforts are being made to not only develop new tourist sites but also better manage the existing tourist areas. It is important for us to prepare the sites for handling the tourist influx during peak season and to harness this opportunity to create economic opportunities for the communities."

Mr. Ali Asghar, Chief Economist KP in his welcome address gave a briefing on sustainable tourism initiatives undertaken by the government. "The use of innovative approaches including, development planning for new and existing destinations, public-private partnerships, reduced carbon footprint and heritage preservation are at the centre of project implementation. INP

Police book Ali Zaidi, 17 other PTI leaders in DC's office protest case

KARACHI: Karachi Police have registered a case against PTI Sindh President Ali Haider Zaidi and 17 other party workers under terrorism and other charges after rival political activists clashed outside the Keamari deputy commissioner's (DC) office.

The clashes followed Sunday's local government elections, the contentious results of which were called into question by the PTI and Jamaat-e-Islami, whose workers took to the streets yesterday. The second phase of the local government elections was held in 16 districts of Sindh on Sunday.

However, according to Site-A Station House Officer Zulfiqar Ali Bajwa, no one has been arrested so far. According to Mobin, he was present at the Keamari DC office on his duty when at around 5pm, some 150-200 PTI workers – led by Zaidi and 17 other leaders – "attacked the DC office while chanting slogans and armed with weapons, canes, and sticks".

The FIR also mentioned that the workers pelted stones at the office and destroyed the furniture, windows, and doors there. It further alleged the rioters stole various valuable items from the office, including laptops. INP

Pakistan calls upon Iran to ensure investigation into cross border terrorist attack in Panjgur

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has called upon the Iranian authorities to ensure a thorough investigation into the cross border terrorist attack that took place in Panjgur district of Balochistan and bring the perpetrators to task.

At her weekly news briefing in Islamabad on Thursday, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said the terrorists used the Iranian soil to target a convoy of security forces patrolling along Pakistan-Iran border. She said we expect Iran to ensure its territory is not used for cross border attacks in Pakistan.

The spokesperson said Pakistan condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. INP

Federal govt seizes power of SC to appoint chairman of NIRC

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has seized the power of the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP), the authority to appoint the chairman of the National Industrial Relations Commission (NIRC) and transferred the power from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to the federal government.

In this connection, the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis inaudibly amended the rules of the National Industrial Relations Commission. Sources told INP that withdrawing the authority of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to appoint the chairman of the NIRC is a violation of the decision of the Supreme Court which was given by the apex court in the case of Riyazul Haque against

Federation of Pakistan. However, the government transferred the power of appointing the chairman of the National Commission for Industrial Relations from the Chief Justice of Pakistan to the federal government.

After the amendment, the federal government will be able to remove the chairman of the National Commission for Industrial Relations and members without giving a notice of one month to keep control. The Supreme Court had given a decision on January 13, 2013 in case of Riyazul Haque vs Federation of Pakistan that the appointment of the chairman of such tribunals and commissions will be carried out in consultation with the Chief Justices of the Supreme Court and High Courts. INP



LAHORE: Special Assistant to Prime Minister Syed Fahad Hussain addressing during meet the press program in press club.

Pakistan condemns continued oppression by Indian troops in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has condemned the continued oppression by Indian troops in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch in her weekly press briefing said during the last week, the Indian forces' personnel continued to carry out cordon and search operations in different parts of Rajouri, Poonch and Reasi districts, harassing the local population.

She said in a disturbing event, two Kashmiri youth were killed in a fake encounter in Budgam district after they were dislodged by the Indian troops from a vehicle and shot dead on spot.

She said a family in Kunan village of Kupwara has been desperately looking for the whereabouts of their son and

brother Abdul Rashid Dar for the last one month. Similarly, she said a truck driver, Dar went missing on 15th December after he was whisked away by Army soldiers from 41 Rashtriya Rifles unit. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said the case of Abdul Rashid Dar, though tragic, is not unique as over the last three decades, hundreds have gone missing while in the custody of Indian forces. According to credible counts, some 8000 persons have gone missing in IIOJK since 1989.

She said Pakistan will continue to raise its voice on the continuing grave human rights abuses in IIOJK and will also continue to extend unstinted moral, political and diplomatic support to the people of Kashmir in their struggle for right to self-determination. INP

Wani urges world community to hold India accountable for its crimes

ISLAMABAD: Leader of All Parties Hurriyat Conference Altaf Hussain Wani while paying homage to the Martyrs of Gawkadul has termed it as one amongst the deadly massacres committed by the Indian occupation forces since 1990.

In a statement issued here the APHC leader while referring to the cold-blooded murder of innocent civilians said that it was one of the most brutal massacres in Kashmir's recent history.

He said that on this fateful day at least fifty persons were killed on the spot when Indian occupation forces opened indiscriminate fire on a peaceful procession at Basant Bagh, Srinagar.

He regrettably noted that since the onset of the ongoing resistance movement in 1989, a number of incidents of mass-

killings have been reported in which hundreds of innocent and unarmed people including men, women and children fell to the bullets of the Indian military and paramilitary forces.

He said that despite the passage of 33 years the victims of the Gawkadul massacre were still wandering from pillar to post in search of justice. Investigation reports submitted to the government had established the Indian army's direct involvement in these horrendous incidents of the violence but no action whatsoever was taken against the perpetrators", Wani said adding that it was high time that the international community should play its much needed role to hold Indian government accountable for the crimes its troops have committed against Kashmiris. INP



ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi addressing the concluding session of the Global Digital Summit.