

QUETTA VOICE

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PM Shehbaz sees 'more burden' on masses as Pakistan scrambles to secure IMF deal



Equipping youth with higher education is not less than revolution: Governor

PTI Balochistan stages demo against possible arrest of Imran Khan

Manan Mandokhail
News Desk

QUETTA-Pakistan Tehrik e Insaaf (PTI) Balochistan staged protest demonstrations against the possible arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan on Tuesday evening. The PTI workers blocked the main airport road and suspended all kinds of traffic against the possible arrest of Imran Khan.

Keeping continue their protest, Syed Zahoor Agha

"Our protest would continue until the PTI command orders", Syed Zahoor Agha, the former Governor of Balochistan said. He said the party workers were committed to keeping continue their protest as per the directives of the PTI chief and other central leaders.

PTI workers also blocked roads in Chaman, Killa Abdullah, Ziarat, Khuzdar, and other parts of Balochistan to vent their anger. They created obstacles and stopped the traffic. Passengers remained the worst sufferers of the agitation by the former ruling party's workers.

Protests against Khan's possible arrest erupt across Pakistan



"We will not leave this imported government", the former Governor of Balochistan, Syed Zahoor Agha said. Mr. Agha joined the protest on airport road Quetta. Strict security measures were adopted by the administration to ensure peace on the eve of the PTI protest in Quetta and other parts of Balochistan.

In response, PTI workers have staged protests across major cities — including

Karachi, Faisalabad, Sargodha, Vehari, Peshawar, and Mianwali — resulting in injuries to police personnel and PTI workers as well.

Police fire tear gas to disperse workers acting as "human shield"

A team of Islamabad police has been in Lahore since yesterday to comply with the court orders to arrest the PTI chairman — who faces a number of cases in different cities.

The riot police, although observing restraint, are using water canons and firing teargas to disperse the party's workers as they move ahead in their quest to arrest Khan.

The law enforcers are in Zaman Park in line with court

orders as on Monday, a district and sessions court in Islamabad restored the former prime minister's non-bailable arrest warrant in the Toshakhana case.

Last week, the IHC suspended the non-bailable arrest warrant for Khan issued by the local court issued due to the PTI chief's continuous absence and directed him to appear before the lower court on March 13 — and he failed to comply with the orders yet again.

Additional riot police called in to control simmering situation

This is the second time in less than 10 days that the police have arrived at Zaman Park to apprehend the deposed prime minister. Taking exception to the developments, President Arif Alvi said he was "deeply saddened by today's events".

"Poor priorities of [government] of a country that should focus on economic misery of the people," he said, slamming the Shehbaz Sharif-led administration in the centre.

Amid the clashes between the PTI's workers and the police, the party's Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi said that the leadership is ready to find out a "possible way out" to avert bloodshed.

The PTI vice chairman, while addressing a press conference at Zaman Park,

Army 'not available' for election duty due to security situation, ECP told

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was informed on Tuesday that the Pakistan Army will not be available for poll-related duties due to the prevalent security situation within the country and on the borders.

chairmanship of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja.

The press release said that in the third meeting, Defence Secretary Lt Gen (ret'd) Hamood Uz Zaman Khan and Additional Secretary Maj Gen



Over the past few months, the law and order situation in the country has worsened, with terrorist groups executing attacks with near impunity across the country. Since the talks with the banned militant group Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan broke down in November, the militant group has intensified its attacks, particularly targeting the police in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and areas bordering Afghanistan.

Separately, provincial elections for the Punjab Assembly are scheduled for April 30 while KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali said earlier today that he has suggested May 28 as the election date in the province. A press release issued from the electoral body said that three important meetings were held today under the

Khurram Sarfraz Khan briefed the CEC and ECP officials on the country's prevalent situation and the military's deployment within Pakistan and on its borders. They said that the army attaches importance to its basic duties, in which the security of the borders and the country is its first priority. They said that the army is not available for election duty at this time due to the present situation in the country," the press release reads. The defence ministry officials said that the current economic situation of the country was also affecting the army.

However, they added that in the end it would be the government's decision whether it kept the military restricted to its primary duties or appointed it for secondary tasks such as election-related duties. Web Desk

Balochistan universities on the verge of financial collapse

Syed Ali Shah Analysis

Two of Balochistan's public universities are on the brink of financial collapse, employees, officials, and faculty members warned. Temporary bail-out packages by the Balochistan government have been less instrumental/effective in addressing the financial woes of universities.

The educational institutions at the most imminent risk are the autonomous Balochistan University of Information Technology Engineering and Management Sciences (BUITEMS) and the University of Balochistan, which have almost financially collapsed.

BUITEMS protesting against non-payment of salaries

Employees and faculty members of BUITEMS have been protesting against the non-payment of their salaries. They also complain that the administration has also stopped other perks and privileges. After the 18th amendment bill, higher



Over 20,000 students studying in both universities

In both universities, currently, over

20,000 students have been studying. This is a future educational lifeline for Balochistan, already lagging behind other provinces in terms of key social indicators including education, health, etc.

Education becomes the first casualty of a financial crisis in universities. The employees and faculty members are right in demanding their salaries and privileges.

However, a senior administration official in one of the two universities revealed that they (universities) have appointed a huge number of contract and ad-hoc employees with the approval of the concerned forsyndicate and Senate.

Recruitment of blue-eyed on ad-hoc basis one of the reasons behind financial crisis

New programs are started without any approval from the syndicate or senate.

Many times non-dev budget is diverted toward the Dev side without any approval.

Their current year budget is not yet passed by the Senate. Many statutory positions are filled on an ad-hoc basis and blue-eyed ones are adjusted instead of properly advertising them.

The current VC of BUITEMS has remained as VC for around 17 years, which is a record tenure, the official revealed. This key official terms these issues as the underlying reasons behind the current financial crisis.

Universities cannot afford further agitation

These two key universities cannot afford further agitations and strikes. It is the core responsibility of the Balochistan government to address the financial crisis and order an inquiry into the recruitment and launching of new programs without any approval. Only, ruthless accountability and strict financial discipline can stop these universities from financial collapse.

2 killed in Khuzdar Balochistan explosion

Ibrar Ahmed

At least two people were killed and seven injured in a bomb explosion in Balochistan's Khuzdar city on Tuesday evening. Police sources said a vehicle was targeted through an improvised explosive device (IED) in the Do Talwar Chowk area of Khuzdar. Two people identified as Haji Amanullah and Naveed were killed in the attack. However, seven people were injured in the blast. The injured were rushed to the Khuzdar district headquarters hospital for medical treatment. An emergency was declared in the hospital to provide medical treatment



to the injured by the blast. Khuzdar police reached the spot as an investigation into the incident went

underway. Security was tightened in and around Khuzdar in the aftermath of the attack.

Equipping youth with higher education is not less than revolution: Governor

News Desk

"Equipping the youth of the remote areas of Balochistan with the jewel of higher education is no less than a revolution", Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Kakar stated. University is basically the highest center of education and training for the new generation.

Mr. Kakar expressed these views while addressing the participants of first convocation of Loralai University on Tuesday. Mr. Kakar praised the conscious efforts of University of Loralai Vice Chancellor Dr. Maqsood Ahmed and his entire team and congratulated the graduating students.

A large number of provincial assembly members Akhtar Hussain Langove, Ahmed Nawaz Baloch, local authorities, parents and students were also present on this occasion. Addressing the participants of the first convocation of Loralai University, Governor Balochistan said that the education of the university has been of key importance for the improvement, protection and prosperity of the society.

Participation in the first convocation of the University of Loralai is a source of pride and joy for all of us. He said that this educational institution established in 2012 has become able today by the grace and grace of Allah that the students here are going to graduate with an honor. The Governor also congratulated all the graduates, their parents and teachers who guided them in



this educational journey.

The importance and usefulness of girls' education in the present era cannot be denied because women constitute more than half of our total population, their education and training is the backbone for the development of both the nation and the society. An educated and knowledgeable mother can provide proper education and training to her children.

This day is the result of tireless efforts of teachers, attention of parents and hard work of students. Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar said that the establishment of University of Loralai was also implemented under this need. He expressed the belief that this prestigious educational institution will continue the journey of educational development in the same way and will play an important role in enlightening the region with modern research and skills. Governor Balochistan said that equipping the youth of the

remote areas of Balochistan with the jewel of higher education is no less than a revolution in the field of education.

The importance and usefulness of girls' education in the present era cannot be denied because women constitute more than half of our total population, their education and training is the backbone for the development of both the nation and the society. An educated and knowledgeable mother can provide proper education and training to her children.

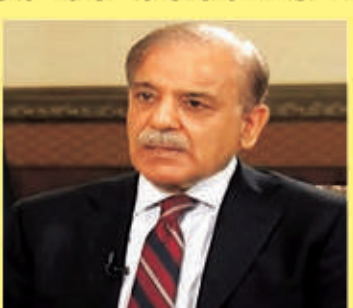
Earlier, Governor Balochistan formally inaugurated the Law College and Main Library in the premises of University of Loralai. Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar distributed certificates to the graduates of University of Loralai. Later, the Governor of Balochistan met separately with the elders of the region and assured them of solving the problems and problems faced by them.

PM Shehbaz sees 'more burden' on masses as Pakistan scrambles to secure IMF deal

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sees "more burden" coming on the already inflation-hit masses moving forward as Pakistan scrambles and meets the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) conditions for reviving the stalled \$1.1 billion loan tranche.

Islamabad had been hosting an IMF mission since early February to negotiate the terms of a deal, including the adoption of policy measures to manage its fiscal deficit ahead of the annual budget due around June.

The funds are part of a \$6.5 billion bailout package the IMF approved in 2019, which analysts say is critical if Pakistan is to avoid defaulting on external debt obliga-



tions. During an interview on Geo News' programme "Capital Talk", the prime minister said that when he came into power, he and his partners were aware that the situation was very bad and that Pakistan

was on the brink of default. But what he did not know was "that Imran Khan had completely gone back on the promises he made with the IMF, and I was also not aware that [IMF's] trust in Pakistan was also damaged to a great deal".

The premier also said that due to Khan's repeated backtracking, the Washington-based lender is forcing Pakistan to implement the pre-conditions for unlocking the loan tranche. "Definitely, these conditions resulted in burdening the masses and they will be burdened further. I absolutely acknowledge this," the prime minister said, mentioning that "hardworking Pakistanis will be burdened by this." Web Desk

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Flaws in the Balochistan census

Flaws have been witnessed in the seventh census underway in Pakistan's Balochistan province. The census is underway amid reservations and apprehensions expressed by the Baloch and Pashtoon nationalist political parties.

The census staff is yet to reach the people living in urban parts of the province. What to speak about the remote areas of the province, which covers half of the country in terms of area and houses only 6% population of entire Pakistan.

Census staff is yet to reach the population in Balochistan. Specific law and order situations, rugged mountains, long distances, plains, and administrative issues make it very difficult to make sure proper and accurate counting of all individuals in Balochistan.

As per the 2017 national census, Balochistan makes hardly 6% population of the entire country. Indeed, this is equal to salt in the flour. It is ironic fate if this meager population is not counted properly during the census of 2023.

Census also a sensitive topic in Balochistan. Like in some cities of Pakistan, census/enumeration is also considered to be one of the sensitive topics in Balochistan. Almost all political parties are skeptical about the process of the current enumeration/census.

The Baloch nationalist parties are concerned about the inclusion of Afghan refugees in the census process and fear that this would bring a demographic change in Balochistan. Similarly, the Pashtoon nationalist parties fear that their (ethnic Pashtuns) population should not be ignored under the garb of Afghan refugees.

Balochistan makes up only 6% population of the entire country. The resource-rich province of Balochistan has a nominal representation in the parliament with only 19 members of the national assembly out of a total of 342. The province has no say in the formation of the federal government, and distribution of development funds under the federal public sector development program (PSDP). Even its (Balochistan) meager share of 6% percent in services is swallowed by Islamabad through fake domiciles.

Balochistan is lagging behind all other provinces in terms of key social indicators including education, health, sanitation and clean drinking water. Nevertheless, its own funds are not utilized in a transparent way because of the worst governance.

To be precise, all political parties should put their heads together and bury the hatchet and come up with one point agenda that a fair and transparent census should be conducted before it is already late.

The power and energy crisis

By Raashid Wali Janjua

Pakistan's power and energy crisis has reached crisis proportions. The power sector's circular debt of Rs2,377 billion – combined with Rs1,400 billion of the gas sector – and Rs600 billion payable to PSO speak volumes of our bad management and the unsustainable structure of power-and-energy-sector governance.

Our power sector structure is flawed – a combination of wrong generation sources, defective transmission and distribution system, poor bill recovery and demand management mechanism.

The failure to plan a balanced energy mix ratio, including an optimal mix of renewables and thermal-based sources has resulted in a disproportionate reliance on thermal-based sources of power generation ie 58.4 per cent. The planning failure on the supply side has also contributed to the present situation.

Supply side planning in Pakistan was predicated on ambitious projections of industrial growth. The lack of industrial development put paid to all optimistic assumptions of power consumption, resulting in a perennial imbalance between demand and supply. The total installed capacity of 43,775MW in Pakistan unfortunately does not get utilized due to lack of

industrial demand and poor transmission and distribution systems.

Pakistan developed thermal-based IPPs to cater for projected demand in the 1990s with generous ROI incentives for IPP owners through attractive tariff and capacity payment terms. In simple terms, the IPPs had to be paid even if they were not producing electricity because of the 'take or pay' provision of power purchase agreements.

Our present generation capacity – that touches a peak of 30,000MW once a while in extreme weather conditions especially in summer and then plummets down significantly – compels us to keep the generation capacity on idle even when not in demand, resulting in hefty capacity payments to IPPs. The demand and production gap of electricity in Pakistan is widening; against the demand of 120,392GWH, only 87,324 GWH was produced in 2018-19.

According to a LUMS Energy Institute (LEI) report, Pakistan with a base load requirement of 8,000MW caters to a demand load of approximately 20,000MW in extreme weather conditions for which it has an installed capacity of over 40,000MW. The impact of this

imbalance is an increase in the cost of power generation, which, for political reasons, is not passed on to end consumers and keeps piling up in the shape of circular debt. Combined with poor bill recovery and transmission and distribution losses, the volume of circular debt keeps rising.

Also, the demand side is not satisfactory. On the demand front, Pakistan needs the actual base load of 8,000MW. Due to seasonal needs – keeping houses and offices cool in summer and warm in winter – the demand often rises to 30,000MW. It is safe to say that Pakistan uses costly power generated mostly through imported fossil fuels to cool walls and roofs at subsidized rates. This indeed is an inefficient way of using costly electricity.

Now even if the temporary demand in summer spikes to 30,000MW, the solution is demand management – which is avoided to keep constituencies happy. There could be several solutions to this over-capacity issue, and one of those is to increase our industrial capacity so that the pressing base load could be taken up from 8,000MW to 14,000MW to reduce the adverse impact of idle capacity.

The present arrangement of spending \$100

billion on capacity payments to IPPs for maintaining the capacity that caters to the requirement of our domestic needs – air conditioning mostly – is the most inefficient way of utilizing power. Most of our IPPs are frontloaded through high capital expenditure (CAPEX) and have long tenors of debt and tariff. The renegotiation of the loan tenor and tariff terms is an option to bring down the cost of generation. But this is only a partial solution which has not borne fruit in the past.

The state of the oil and gas sector is also not enviable as the country has consumed 79.8 per cent and 66 per cent of the oil and gas reserves. With the cheap domestic gas sources drying up fast, Pakistan is likely to run out of domestic natural resources by 2030. Pakistan is purchasing costly liquefied natural gas and putting that into 186,000km-long pipeline infrastructure to burn it in domestic stoves.

The government is purchasing gas at a cost of \$16/mmbtu and selling it at a cost of \$2-6/mmbtu to rural and urban domestic consumers. The resulting gap in price recovery – plus gas thefts and transmission losses due to poor infrastructure – results in the gas sector's circular debt. This state of affairs is unsustainable.

We need long-term structural reforms through better regulation of the power sector and professional management.

Pakistan needs to enhance its industrial capacity for efficient consumption of its power capacity in addition to demand management through administrative measures like weather-friendly house designs, installation of smart metres and AMRs, plugging thefts through an overhauled transmission and distribution system and the gradual altering of energy mix, enhancing the share of hydel and renewables like wind and solar energy.

Price signalling is one of the effective tools to control energy waste. The cost of piped gas needs to be realistic and the exploration of the domestic oil and gas resources be expedited through special incentives to E&P companies. Pakistan needs an upstream regulator in the oil and gas sector along with the merger of Nepra with Ogra to bring more synergy in energy planning. The country also needs refinery policy urgently to help refineries upscale their productivity.

Pakistan should take some immediate steps like bold reforms, expert presence in the power and energy ministries, merger of regulators.

Gaming out a default

Ammar Habib Khan

Pakistan has been in a precipice of default for the last few months, desperately seeking external help, enacting draconian policies, while refusing to initiate any structural reforms.

About nine months back, when the global commodity cycle was easing out, and interest rates were increasing globally, ample warnings were given for some course correction. An expected increase in interest rates globally was a harbinger of tightening in global liquidity, making it difficult to rollover existing debt, or raise fresh debt in a time of global macroeconomic instability.

The warnings that were doled out in the first half of 2022 went unheeded, and the fiscal profligacy of the government continued without any thought of potential unintended consequences. The sovereign continued with its fiscally irresponsible ways, while the central bank continued to encourage such profligacy through stimulative monetary actions, even though the situation called for an accelerated reduction in fiscal deficits, and to put the house in order.

The government refused to expand the taxation base, and when someone tried to do the same, they were quickly

shown the door. As the taxation base remained largely unchanged, real growth in tax revenues is negative as inflation far outpaces any growth in tax revenues.

Precious time was wasted, and is still being wasted. The government, and the usual suspects, continue to pretend that they are living in an environment where interest rates globally are zero, and we are flushed with liquidity, and the country may get a bailout yet another time. Such stubborn behaviour has led to an illusion that the country may get yet another lifeline. But it may not be forthcoming anytime soon, as we have seen lately with considerable delays in the resumption of the IMF programme – something that could have been done about six months back.

Since we did not do any course correction earlier, and continue to believe in unicorns, the chickens are now coming home to roost. The central bank – the State Bank of Pakistan – increased the policy rate to its highest ever level of 20 per cent, and still we are in a deep negative real rate region, signifying potential for another round of interest rate hike. As the interest rate increases, so does the cost of borrowing, and the government is the largest borrower in the country.

Government borrowing makes up almost 70 per cent of the country's banking assets. Over the years, the government has completely crowded out private-sector credit, as it borrowed to plug perennial fiscal deficits. The government borrows through the banking system through a mix of treasury bills, bonds, sukus, and other instruments, as well as through its various state-owned entities. Government borrowing through various modes, whether directly, or indirectly is more than Rs22 trillion. The government through its inefficient commodity procurement programmes has also accumulated significant debt to support ill-conceived support prices – the cost of which is also borne by the taxpayer.

As interest rates increase, so will the cost of borrowing, and interest payments on that debt. The government will continue to print more money to pay interest on the accrued debt, and create more debt in the process. It is estimated that if interest rates increase more and the government does not plug its deficit, almost two-thirds of the government budget will inadvertently go towards servicing debt.

Such a rapid growth in debt servicing requirements will squeeze away any room for developmental expenditure. As

inflation is expected to top 40 per cent, there will be a pressure to increase government wages, and pensions. This will increase the expenditure side, and lead to further deficits.

In the absence of any plan to reduce fiscal deficit, the ability of the sovereign to keep plugging the deficit with debt is quickly eroding. As debt repayments become unsustainable, the next best option is a move towards restructuring of debt, often referred to as default. A scenario which is already in play in countries like Sri Lanka, Ghana, and Zambia. The common thread between all is a coterie of overconfident policymakers. An event that we could have avoided, and may still avoid, but absence of a plan, and the sheer aloofness of those at the helm continues to push the population of 230 million to a complete economic disaster.

If debt becomes unsustainable, a potential restructuring may be in order, and that would be either deferral of interest payment that the government has to make on its debt, or a potential haircut (reduction in amount), on the debt that is payable to different debt holders.

In the local context, commercial banks are the biggest holders of local government debt, wherein they use deposi-

tor money to lend to the government. In case there is a haircut on debt, the commercial banks will have to take significant losses as well, which may affect solvency of many banks, and would shake the foundations of the financial sector at large. Any such event can potentially lead to multiple bank runs, something that should be avoided at all costs.

If a potential restructuring event happens, that will also make other government or government-banked assets susceptible to restructuring, which would basically mean all of the power sector – as the government continues to be the single buyer of power, and has issued sovereign guarantees to cover risk of many power projects. Potential restructuring on that end would further stress an already precarious circular debt scenario.

There isn't much time left to do course correction. Any further delays in consolidating our fiscal position, and believing in illusions, will push the country and its population over the edge. This is a doomsday scenario that can still be avoided. Consolidation right now can lead to a few tough months, but can save the country from a tough decade that may follow in case more time is wasted.

Pakistan at 75

By Dr Naazir Mahmood

The Round Table – the

Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs – has been enlightening its readers since 1910. It offers analysis and commentary on various aspects of international affairs, exclusively focusing on the Commonwealth countries. On the 75th anniversary of the independence of India and Pakistan, 'The Round Table' brought out two separate issues for the two countries.

Since both issues are highly insightful, perhaps it would not be out of place to share some of the ideas discussed in the special issue with the readers of these pages. The current editor of 'The Round Table' is Barrister Venkat Iyer who has been leading the team of this journal for over a decade now. This article will discuss the issue covering Pakistan, and in the next one, it will be India's turn. For the Pakistan issue, 'The Round Table' decided to invite Prof Ilhan Niaz of Quaid-e-Azam University (QAU) to serve as guest editor.

The special issue presents six detailed articles, seven short opinion pieces, and three book reviews – all relevant to Pakistan and the Indian Subcontinent. With writers such as Asim Sajjad Akhtar, Frahan Hanif Siddiqui, Iftikhar Malik, Ilhan Niaz, Ishtiaq Ahmed and Pervez

Hoodbhoy, the journal brings together some of the best scholar writing on Pakistan in the 21st century. Though all articles are worth reading, this article will discuss a few of them.

Frahan Hanif Siddiqui teaches at QAU and has established himself as a prolific writer and scholar on Pakistan affairs. His article 'Unity in diversity: constituting and constructing Pakistan's national identity' deserves a special mention as it critically explores the evolution and expression of Pakistani national identity.

He argues that national identity in Pakistan is essentially a project of assertion in the post-colonial period. Since the inception of Pakistan, there has been ambiguity over the religious versus secular direction of Pakistani identity, whereas there has been a clear assertion by the state on a single national identity that was supposed to be just 'Pakistani' – even at the cost of all other ethnic or linguistic identities.

While projecting an 'absolutist national identity', the state of Pakistan has always been averse to subnational identities that had to be strictly sidelined while following an overarching single path. Siddiqui presents three elemental positions of Pakistan's national identity discourse: the nationalist, the perennialist, and the social constructivist. His article argues in favour of a humanist-centred interpretation to pro-

mote a diverse, inclusive and tolerant definition of Pakistan.

Siddiqui's case for a humanist approach to identity is convincing as in the past 75 years the country has not been able to give equal rights to its minorities, and there is still widespread discrimination on the basis of caste, community, and creed.

Majority groups constantly question the loyalty of smaller groups to the single Pakistani identity and their true allegiance is also in doubt. This fear of disloyalty has played havoc with the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities of diverse groups of people living across Pakistan. There is a constant state of paranoia that any identity other than the single Pakistani one could sabotage the state. This approach has increased intolerance in society and any talk of plurality is frowned upon especially by those who consider themselves as the paramount defenders of one dominant ideology.

Ishtiaq Ahmed is a renowned political scientist and writer of three major books and dozens of articles and essays, serving currently as professor emeritus in Sweden. His article 'The partition memory and the Pakistan nation-state project, 75 years on' deals with the memories of the partition of India that have been haunting the people of this region, especially in Punjab on both sides of the borders. Though the rights

The technocratic takeover

The whispers of the new technocratic setup have decreased a little but it is an idea that needs to be strongly debunked as it raises its ugly head every few years.

Why are such short-term and stop-gap desperate measures such as installing a technocratic setup bad? This has to do with accountability. Given the fact that Pakistan has all kinds of rent-seeking and corrupt elite, it is only democracy that ensures some form of accountability of the political class through elections every five years. The non-political technocratic elite is not accountable to anyone.

Democracy has a 'feedback loop' built in the system. The political class has to take into account the public aspirations since it has to seek votes to come to and remain in power. Any technocratic setup has no such compulsions. Therefore, a government without accountability is a non-starter.

The poor in the country are hugely disempowered. The bureaucratic, legal, judicial, socio-political, and economic system works against them and is mostly alien to them. The poor only have the power to vote that they can leverage to get a pittance of favourable terms for themselves. Endorsing any idea for technocratic setup is equivalent to snatching the last vista of empowerment of the poor from them.

The much-condemned political patronage sys-

tem is sometimes the only refuge the poor have to negotiate their way with state institutions. Social science literature has shown time and again that the poor use their power of vote and politics of patronage to deal with 'thana/katchehry' and other government institutions. Any technocratic setup cannot deliver for the poor the way democracy does.

It is true that though democracy largely delivers for the people, it should not be so populist that it becomes the slave of anti-rational socio-political and economic policies – an example being the government's inability to tax traders as political parties are afraid of the power of the trader class and are unwilling to bear the political cost of antagonizing them in elections. As a result, politicians do not tax them, and this is bad for the country's economy. However, such short-sighted policies are not limited to democratic governments; traders have never been taxed by authoritarian regimes in Pakistan as well. It shows the problem is not democracy that can be fixed by the mirage of any technocratic setup; the malaise is deeper than that and it needs structural overhaul.

When democracy was given some breathing space between 2008 and 2016, some evidence showed the emergence of across-the-board public service delivery in the Punjab education sector, despite it co-existing with

the culture of selective patronage/sifarish in high-powered politics. It is important to highlight this trend. There are not enough public funds to please all the voters through the politics of patronage. If regime change only occurs through performance-based competitive elections, democracy will surely and slowly move towards universal public service delivery despite having some selected pockets of patronage. It will largely propel the system to deliver for the people.

The only thing derailing the system is political instability and this entrenched game of musical chairs that does not let any civilian regime to continue. Both Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto were not financially corrupt, then why were they not allowed to remain in power? One can only imagine how Pakistan would have taken a different trajectory had Mujib/Bhutto ruled the country for extended periods. One can look at Bangladesh to have an idea as it has been transformed into an emerging economic power since Sheikh Hasina took power in 2009. Pakistan might have prospered like this too, but Mujib/Bhutto were not allowed to remain in power for long.

Post-1988, all political governments have been facing political instability as a built-in feature in the system. How can we expect democracy to deliver when it is being

systematically undermined all the time and when some present a technocratic setup as a panacea?

The Pakistani elite has largely survived in the last 70 plus years by earning geostrategic rents from external powers and coercive rents from inside the country. Now that geostrategic rents have dried up and the ability of the internal system to pay coercive rents has diminished due to adverse economic conditions, the squabbling over the limited resources has started. Some voices call for the reversal of the 18th Amendment and the 7th NFC Award. Some argue that the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) should be stopped – things we heard before the 2018 general elections. Now, recently, an oped called for ending public education in the country and replacing it with a private voucher scheme or insurance.

It is true that the private education system is largely more efficient than the public education system, and we have written about it in these pages in the past. It is also true that the private education system does not have its presence in cities only; it is also prevalent in rural areas. However, not all provinces have private schools. Rural Sindh and Balochistan and former tribal areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa do not have a strong private-school system as Punjab does.

Education comes third in terms of government

By Foqia Sadiq Khan

expenditure – after debt-servicing and defence. Hence, the call to undo it has entered a new phase of fight over public resources. Public education has to (and must) continue, and the sector must have better accountability. We have evidence that with technologies such as geo-tagging, public-sector employees' absenteeism can be better monitored. Why can't our authorities reform the public education system that delivers even in the far-fetched areas of the country instead of replacing it with a private voucher scheme?

Politicians should at least spare education in this new quest for more financial resources. Similarly, the provinces must generate their revenues and also need to better spend the provincial resources that they are given and devolve the financial and administrative resources to the district and sub-district levels.

Recent media reports show how the present PTI-PMQ government in Punjab is spending all the provincial resources in the hometown, district of the present chief minister and over-extending patronage spending in a way that is not good for the public welfare. Such counter-productive patronage spending will be effectively deaf with if there is an autonomous system that distributes provincial resources to the lowest tier of the government just as the 7th NFC Award gives it to provinces.

It's all about politics

By Dr Farrukh Saleem

Our politicians are deeply and dangerously divided. Our judiciary is divided. Our state institutions are divided. We the people are also divided – along political lines. Red alert: we are divided like never before.

Someone intelligent once said, "It's all about politics, stupid." Politics is where the story really begins. Our democracy-loving politicians do not consider each other as enemies. Our democracy-loving politicians do not consider each other as democratic competitors. They all want to send their opponents to disease-infected prison cells. Our democracy-loving politicians do not consider each other as democratic opponents. They want to annihilate each other; destroy and obliterate one another.

Here's a proven formula, a formula that has stood the test of time: political stability leads to economic progress. Political stability results in two things: long-term planning and higher levels of investment. Result: economic progress. Look at Botswana, a small African country that gained independence in 1966. Botswana has had a stable government and that overtime has resulted in country-wide economic development. Yes, political stability has turned Botswana into one of the

fastest growing economies in the world.

Chile, a Latin American country, is another example of political stability bringing in economic growth and a reduction in poverty. Chile is an example of economic progress through political stability. South Korea is another example of a country that has experienced economic progress through political stability. Singapore is another outstanding example of economic progress because of political stability. Singapore's politicians have turned Singapore into one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

Here's another proven formula, a formula that has stood the test of time: political instability has four distinct consequences: economic uncertainty, volatility, a lack of confidence among investors and stagnation. Venezuela is a case in point. Remember, Venezuela has more proven oil reserves than any other country in the world, a total of 304 billion barrels. Venezuela is a case in point: contested elections, political turmoil and unrest. Result: hyperinflation, a decline in investment, a shortage of basic goods and a severe decline in living standards. Look at Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is mineral rich with coal, copper, iron ore, vanadium, tin, platinum, lithium and nickel. But a contested presidential election and political instability has resulted in hyperinflation, a lack of

foreign investment and a decline in living standards. Let us learn something from Democratic Republic of Congo. Contested elections, a long-running civil war, political instability and a lack of investment in key sectors like mining and agriculture. Take Iraq, for instance – the second-largest crude oil producer in OPEC after Saudi Arabia with 145 billion barrels. Ongoing political instability resulting in sectarian violence, political unrest and economic stagnation.

Here's Pakistan with several significant accomplishments. It has the fourth-largest irrigated land area globally, following China, India, and the US. Additionally, Pakistan ranks fourth in cotton production, fourth in sugarcane production, and fifth in milk production worldwide. Moreover, Pakistan is the sixth-largest date producer globally and the eighth-largest producer of wheat. Pakistan holds 105 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves. Reko Digg has 5.9 billion tonnes of copper ore and 41.5 million ounces of gold. Pakistan has the world's second-largest salt reserves. Our hydropower potential exceeds 60,000 MW.

"It's all about politics, stupid." Pakistan's primary issue is political, rather than economic. The root of our economic problems lies in the political sphere, and ultimately, the solution to our challenges lies in the hands of our politicians.

Police seize 20,000 litres of stolen crude oil concealed in secret tank of dumper

KARACHI: Police seized 20,000 litres of crude oil hidden in the secret parts of a dumper at Shah Latif area of the provincial capital.

SSP Malir said police arrested the suspect belonging to a group involved in transportation of stolen crude oil in the guise of sand and gravel transport. "The accused was concealing and transporting crude oil in a sand and gravel load dumper. He had secretly built a tank in the dumper, during the search 20,000 litres of crude oil was found," said SSP Malir.

According to the police, a case has been registered against the dumper driver Abdul Rahman. Officials added that the investigation of the accused is going on while the petroleum companies are also being contacted to find out from where the crude oil was stolen. INP



ISLAMABAD: A large num of people are taking free meals at Aabpara market, in Federal capital.

Pakistan, Canada discuss ways to promote cooperation in trade, investment

ISLAMABAD: The High Commissioner of Canada, Ms. Leslie Scanlon and Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar here on Tuesday exchanged views on enhancing bilateral relations in various avenues and cooperation in a number of fields including trade, investment and climate resilience.

During a call on meeting of the High Commissioner with the Finance Minister, both the sides discussed overall global economic situation as well as economic policies and programmes of the government in Pakistan.

According to press statement issued by finance ministry, Ishaq Dar said both the countries were having friendly relations and commended the support of Canadian government for flood affected people.

Pakistan requests WB for additional financing, assistance for health related projects

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Masood Khan has requested the World Bank (WB) for additional financing and assistance for health related projects, especially to address the issue of water-borne diseases in the flood affected areas. He also solicited Bank's support in transitioning from adaptation and mitigation to building resilience.

Earlier in September 2022, he visited Pakistan and reaffirmed Bank's commitment to support people of Pakistan in wake of catastrophic flooding. The Ambassador thanked the World Bank for contributing US\$ 2 billion towards flood recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction during International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan in Geneva which would cover support for housing, water and agriculture, social protection and health, among others.

The Ambassador also thanked the Bank for releasing around \$1.2 billion of committed funds for various ongoing projects in Pakistan. Smooth flow of funds would ensure timely completion of social sector schemes, he continued. Masood Khan requested the Bank for additional financing and assistance for health related projects, especially to address the issue of water-borne diseases in the flood affected areas. He also solicited Bank's support in transitioning from adaptation and mitigation to building resilience.

WB to enhance cooperation with Pakistan for its long-term development

WASHINGTON: The World Bank remains committed to Pakistan's long-term development with focus on transitioning to renewable energy, especially hydro and solar power, said a senior official of the international development and climate institution.

Last October, Martin Raiser co-chaired with the United Kingdom a high level roundtable on how to respond to the impacts of the catastrophic floods in Pakistan on the sidelines of 2022 Annual Meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The Ambassador thanked World Bank for contributing US\$ 2 billion towards flood recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction during International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan in Geneva which would cover support for housing, water and agriculture, social protection and health, among others.

5-day rain spell expected in KP

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Tuesday predicted five-day rain spell from March 16-20 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

A westerly wave is likely to approach western parts of the country on Thursday (March 16) and may persist till Monday. Rain-wind thunderstorm and hailstorm are expected in Chitral, Lower and Upper Dir, Malakand, Swat, Buner, Shangla, Kohistan, Battagram, Torgar, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Charsadda, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, Hangu, Karak, Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank, Dera Ismail Khan, North and South Waziristan districts.

Isolated snowfall over the high mountains of Chitral, Dir, Upper Swat and Kohistan districts is expected during the forecast period. Rain may trigger landslides in vulnerable areas of Chitral, Swat, Shangla, Buner, Kohistan, Battagram, Torgar, Mansehra and Abbottabad districts.

Five robbers arrested

LAHORE: Khadian police arrested five robbers including two wounded after police encounter here on Tuesday.

Police said that a citizen, Maratab reported on police help line number-15 that four robbers snatched cash, motorcycle and mobile phone from him and fled. The team on information set up a picket near Peyal road while the bandits after seeing police opened fire. The team retaliated and during the gunfight, two dacoits suffered injuries and fell on the ground, whereas other accomplices managed to escape.



MUZAFFARABAD: People are shouting slogan during protest in favor of their demands at Apradiya Yadgar Chowk.

LHC seeks reply on plea challenging Mohsin Naqvi's appointment

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Tuesday sought response from the respondents on a plea challenging appointment of Mohsin Raza Naqvi as the caretaker of the Punjab chief minister. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Jan 22 appointed Mohsin Naqvi as the caretaker Punjab Chief Minister after the parliamentary committee failed to reach a consensus.



LAHORE: Workers of PTI hold bamboo sticks in their hands during clash between Police and supporters of Chairman PTI Imran Khan outside Khan's house to prevent officers from arresting him.

Islamabad court suspends Imran's arrest warrants in judge threat case

ISLAMABAD: A court in the federal capital suspended the non-bailable arrest warrants of PTI Chairman former prime minister Imran Khan in woman judge threatening case.

Additional Sessions Judge Faizan Haider Gillani suspended the warrants till March 16 after Imran Khan challenged the decision of a district and sessions court. A legal team comprising advocate Naeem Haider Panjutha and advocate Intizar Haider Panjutha represented the PTI chief in the case.

Senior Civil Judge Rana Mujahid Rahim had issued non-bailable arrest warrants for PTI chief Imran Khan over his continuous skipping of court hearings. The case against the former prime minister was registered on August 20, 2022, with Margalla police station in the federal capital over his remarks at a rally in F9 Park where he warned Additional District and Sessions Judge Zeba Chaudhry and police high-ups of dire consequences for what he called their "biased" attitude towards his party.

PM announces provision of free wheat flour to 1m deserving people of ICT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has announced to provide free wheat flour to one million poor and middle class people of the Federal capital during Ramadan. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting in Islamabad that reviewed measures to protect the poor and middle class segment of society from the adverse impacts of inflation.

No decision so far on seat adjustment in Punjab with PDM: Kaira

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Prime Minister on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Qamar Zaman Kaira has stated that no decision had been taken by the party leadership regarding the seat adjustment with Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). "It would be too early to say anything regarding seat adjustment with Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) in Punjab and no such decision had been taken by the party leadership" he expressed these views while talking to a private news channel.

Responding a question, he said taking gifts from Toshakhana was not a crime, but selling gifts received as Head of the State was not morally correct. Criticizing Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan, he said, that by selling Toshakhana gifts, the PTI chief did not disclose the earned income in his income statement, which was a clear case of "tax evasion".

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PTI writes letter to CJ LHC for nomination of judicial officers

LAHORE: PTI has requested Chief Justice (CJ) Lahore High Court (LHC) to nominate judicial officers in connection with April 30 general election in Punjab.

PTI leaders Fawad Chaudhry has written a letter to CJ LHC whereby the matter of nomination of judicial officers in connection with general election in Punjab has been raised. Fawad said in his letter the elections are held through DROs

and ROs comprising judicial officers. PTI seized with surprise and concern over the rejection of election commission plea regarding nomination of judicial officers for holding election. The letter said Supreme Court (SC) has given clear directives in its March 01, 2023 suo motu case decision with regard to this matter. The articles 213, 218 and 220 of the constitution provide clear

directives in this regard. It was further said in the letter federal government and caretaker government Punjab are crossing all limits in subjecting the PTI leadership and workers to victimization. Chairman PTI Imran Khan made hairbreadth escape in a murderous attack. But he received deep injuries. The PTI leaders and workers are being tortured and persecuted. The PTI workers and leaders

are being implicated in false and fake case to keep them from election. Election commission has too failed in maintaining its neutrality, if the matter of holding polls is assigned to subordinate officers of government instead of judicial officers then the possibility of transparent polls will stand ruled out. People will too not accept them. We are aware judiciary is overburdened



RAWALPINDI: Vendors are displaying sound system for selling purpose, in the City.

Judge threatening case: Islamabad court suspends arrest warrants of Imran Khan till March 16

ISLAMABAD: District and Sessions Court Islamabad has suspended arrest warrants of PTI chairman Imran Khan till March 16 in lady judge threatening case. The counsels of Imran Khan appeared in the district and sessions Court Islamabad led by Additional Sessions Judge Faizan Haider Gillani Tuesday. Counsel for Imran Khan took the plea in the court all the clauses imposed on Imran Khan are bailable. The judge questioned were the bailable arrest warrants issued before. The counsel for Imran Khan replied bailable arrest warrants in lady judge threatening case were not issued before. The court directed the counsels for Imran Khan to submit the details after their correction remarking "I am reading the documents provided by you since 15 minutes but I have failed to understand them. The counsel for Imran Khan said Imran Khan is former Prime Minister (PM). Providing security to them is responsibility of government. Security has been withdrawn from Imran Khan by the government. The learned judge questioned is there any letter with you wherein it is written that security has been

withdrawn from Imran Khan. The counsel for Imran Khan said "I provide it to you. The judge remarked "provide this letter till tomorrow. The state counsel said Imran Khan was summoned in Toshakhana case. The judge remarked Imran Khan election campaign has been started. The counsel for Imran Khan said Imran Khan appeared in judicial complex. Additional Sessions Judge questioned Imran Khan appeared in judicial complex but he has not appeared in Kutchery. Attack in Kutchery took place in 2014, was kutchery shifted after it. There was Imran led government in the country but even then kutchery was not shifted. You did not get shift kutchery during PTI government tenure. Tell us any one legal reform of PTI. The judge remarked Imran Khan has already come to kutchery and he can come again. The copies of the case were to be provided to him, therefore, he was summoned by the court. Copies of case are provided to accused in his personal capacity and these are not provided to someone else. The state counsel said clauses are bailable or otherwise, these have nothing to do with the arrest warrants. The counsel for Imran Khan said security has been withdrawn. This is my case. INP



KARACHI: A view of burn huts of gypsy people at Malir 15 k locality.

Mariyum asks PML-N candidates for Punjab PA elections to submit applications by March 18

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mariyum Aurangzeb on Tuesday said Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz candidates, aspiring to participate in forthcoming Punjab Provincial Assembly election, should immediately submit applications to the PML-N Central Secretariat, 180 H, Model, Lahore.

In a tweet, she said the last date for submission of applications was March 18. She said in line with the decision of the party, the candidates were once again informed to submit their applications as soon as possible. INP

Imran Khan's arrest: police, PTI workers clash outside Zaman Park residence

LAHORE: The Islamabad police on Tuesday used water cannon and tear gas to disperse PTI workers gathered outside party chief Imran Khan's Zaman Park residence in Lahore.

The police team reached Lahore to arrest Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan after a district and sessions court issued his non-bailable arrest warrants for failing to attend the hearing in Toshakhana reference.

The court of ADSJ Zafar Iqbal restored non-bailable arrest warrants for Imran in the Toshakhana reference. It instructed the police to arrest the PTI chief and present him in court by March 18.

In a statement, the Islamabad police spokesperson said that they have reached Lahore to arrest PTI chief on court orders. INP

PTI seeks permission for Minar-e-Pakistan rally

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has sought permission for a public rally at Minar-e-Pakistan on March 19.

The application was given to the district administration by PTI Lahore President Sheikh Intiaz. On the other hand, the district admin has denied receiving any application from PTI for the Minar-e-Pakistan rally.

According to the district admin, the permission for Minar-e-Pakistan rally would be given by district intelligence committee by reviewing all safety measures as PSL final is also scheduled on March 19. Former premier and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan has announced to hold a power show at Minar-e-Pakistan on Sunday.

A large number of PTI workers and supporters attended the rally led by chairman Imran Khan. After crossing different routes, the rally reached Data Darbar where the PTI chief addressed the workers. INP

Six arrested after clash during anti-encroachment drive

KARACHI: The situation became tense after violent clashes erupted between the police and protesters in Gulistan-e-Jauhar block 11 during an anti-encroachment drive, ARY News reported on Tuesday.

As per details, the people gathered in the area to demonstrate against an anti-encroachment drive in the area. When officials of the anti-encroachment department and Karachi Development Authority kicked off the operation in line with the orders of the SHC, people staged protest in order to obstruct the operation. They also blocked traffic on roads by putting tyres on fire. The protest met with baton charge when people turned violent and they resorted to stone pelting and aerial firing. A policeman was injured in the incident and he has been shifted to hospital for treatment. INP

Senate holds important role in legislation, promoting national cohesion: Sanjrani

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani inaugurated a painting at the Parliament House in Islamabad on Tuesday in connection with the three-day Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Senate of Pakistan.

Speaking on this occasion, he said the Senate of Pakistan has an important role in legislation and promoting national cohesion. He said the Senate of Pakistan was formed in 1973 to ensure equal representation of all the federating units.

The Chairman Senate said under the government's austerity drive and keeping in view the prevailing situation, we decided to confine the celebrations to three days. He said we also inaugurated today a commemorative stamp issued by the Pakistan Post, a commemorative coin and a medal-

lion in connection with the Golden Jubilee celebrations. Sadiq Sanjrani also thanked Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Finance Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar for extending their support in releasing the coin and the medallion.

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KP Governor gives May 28 date for election in province

ISLAMABAD: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa talking to media has said that he has given May 28 date to the election commission for general election in the province.

Talking to media here, Governor Ghulam Ali said that recently the census teams have been attacked in Lakki Marwat and Tank districts of the province. "How could the candidates run their election campaigns in these circumstances," he questioned.

"Security situation has been worst in KP," he said. "Policemen were attacked in Tank yesterday," governor said. The team conducting population census was targeted, he said.

"Our main problem is the law and order, it will be difficult if the law and order not improved," he said.

"I have given May 28 date for election in KP, now it is upto the election commission to opt for election in such circumstances." "We pray for peaceful election in KP," Governor Ghulam Ali said.

Met office predicts rain in Karachi in coming days

KARACHI: Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Tuesday predicted light to moderate rainfall in parts of Sindh including Karachi from March 16 to 20. According to the Meteorological department (MET Office), a westerly wave is likely to enter upper parts of the country on March 16 and will prevail till March 20.

Under the influence of this weather system, wind-dust/thunderstorm-rain is expected in Sukkur, Jacobabad, Larkana, Shaheed Benazirabad, Mirpurkhas, Dadu and Karachi from March 17 to 19, the Met Office said.

"Rainfall is also expected in Chitral, Dir, Swat, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Kohistan, Shangla, Buner, Haripur, Karak, Peshawar, Kohat,

"Our tribesmen are protesting, apprehensions to tribal elders have also been told," governor said. "I was under pressure from the nation and the merged districts. Election date was my constitutional responsibility, which have fulfilled," he said.

"My duty has done now it is upto the institutions and the caretaker government," KP governor said. "We have to honour the supreme court's decision," governor said.

"There are reports of state institutions, it also seems to me that the elections are not possible," governor said.

"I want elections of all assemblies on same day and initiating contacts will all political parties," he said.

"All political parties including the PTI want election on a single day," he claimed. "Zaman Park has also been contacted, they have also opted for it," he said.

Governor Ghulam Ali went to the Presidency for another meeting with President Anif Aivli. INP

Charsada, Nowshera, Swabi, Bajaur, Kurram, Waziristan, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan. "Rain-wind-dust/thunderstorm (with isolated heavy fall & hailstorm) is expected in Murree, Galliyat, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Attock, Chakwal, Jhelum, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Hafizabad, Mandi Bahauddin, Sialkot, Narowal, Lahore from 16th to 20th March. While, in Faisalabad, Toba Tek Singh, Jhang, Kasur, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Khushab, Mianwali, Sargodha, Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Bhakkar, Layyah, Kot Addu, Khanewal, Sahiwal, Pakpattan and Bahawalpur," it added. The weather department has advised all concerned authorities to remain alert to avoid any untoward situation during the forecast period. INP



KARACHI: Pakistani dwellers visit their destroyed homes, after fire broke out shanties in a slum area of Gulshan-e-Qadri, Malir in Karachi, Pakistan.

Dar commends support of Canadian Govt for flood victims

Islamabad: Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar has appreciated the Canadian investment in Pakistan and extended full support and cooperation of the government to enhance the economic relations between both the countries.

He expressed Pakistan's commitment during a meeting between Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and High Commissioner of Canada Leslie Scanlon in Islamabad on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the Finance Minister commended the support of the Canadian Government for flood affected in Pakistan.

The two sides discussed overall global economic situation as well as economic policies and programmes of the government in Pakistan.

They exchanged views on enhancing bilateral relations in various avenues and cooperation in a number of fields including trade, investment and climate resilience.

The Finance Minister briefed the Canadian envoy about the economic outlook of the country and the challenges being faced by the country, coupled with huge losses due to the devastating floods last year.

He further shared that the government with its pragmatic policy decisions has not only

arrested the economic decline but is also steering the economy towards stability and growth.

Ishaq Dar also shared that the government has taken difficult decisions in key sectors, including energy sector in order to reduce budgetary and current account deficits and increase the revenue generation.

The Finance Minister informed about the talks held with IMF Mission and reiterated the commitment of the government to complete the existing IMF program and fulfil all the international obligations.

On this occasion, the Canadian High Commissioner shared sentiments of deep rooted friendly relations between Pakistan and Canada saying that both countries enjoy excellent relations, which need to be further promoted especially on trade, investment and Climate resilience.

She informed about the newly developed strategy for the region through which Pakistan will be able to access for climate resilience and re-building.

The Canadian High Commissioner supported the policies and programs of the government for socio-economic development and economic growth. INP

Maryam Nawaz, Hamza to contest Punjab Assembly elections

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senior Vice President former Punjab chief minister Hamza Shahbaz have decided to contest Punjab Assembly elections.

According to sources, the PML-N Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz Sharif will contest election on PP-146 seat while former Punjab CM Hamza Shahbaz will contest the poll from PP-150.

According to party insiders, their nomination papers would be filed today (Tuesday).

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Hamza returned to Pakistan after spending three months with his family in US and London.

Hamza Shahbaz Sharif reached Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport in the wee hours of Tuesday where he was warmly welcomed by the PML-N local leaders.

The former Punjab chief minister returned home after ECP announced Punjab Assembly elections on April 30. INP

Fawad lauds ECP for not succumbing to pressure for delaying elections

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Fawad Chaudhry appreciated the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for not succumbing to pressure for delaying elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

The former information minister made the dramatic political volte-face weeks after he secured bail in a seditious case filed against over criticism of ECP boss and members over delay in announcement of election schedule despite dissolution of assemblies in the provinces. It is on the record that he has been accusing the chief election commissioner of acting as team "B" of the ruling Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

The change in his tone was witnessed when he appeared before a bench of the ECP members in a contempt case in which PTI Chairman Imran Khan, Asad Umar and other party leaders are also nominated. "We have praised your role but didn't notice it. Whole nation has trust in two institutions, the election commission and Supreme Court," INP

ECP extends deadline for nomination papers in Punjab Assembly elections

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has extended the deadline for nomination paper filings till March 16 aiming to facilitate candidates vying for provincial assembly elections of Punjab province.

According to ECP spokesperson, the extension was granted in response to the demands of candidates and was aimed at providing ample time to complete the nomination process. The ECP has also extended the deadline for filing nomination papers for reserved seats for women and minorities to March 16. Political parties have been asked to submit their priority lists of candidates separately to the office of the relevant returning officer, the provincial election commissioner of Punjab. It is important to note that the

schedule of elections, which was issued on March 8, would remain unchanged.

The polling was set to be held on April 30, and political parties were expected to comply with the ECP's instructions to ensure a smooth and transparent election process. According to ECP spokesperson, the extension was granted in response to the demands of candidates and was aimed at providing ample time to complete the nomination process. The ECP has also extended the deadline for filing nomination papers for reserved seats for women and minorities to March 16. Political parties have been asked to submit their priority lists of candidates separately to the office of the relevant returning officer, the provincial election commissioner of Punjab. INP



ISLAMABAD: Sadiq Sanjrani Chairman of the Senate called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

ANF seizes over 1652kg drugs worth \$33.302m

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan has seized 1652.968 kg drugs and 1846 liters prohibited chemical, worth US\$ 33.302 million internationally, arrested 45 persons including two women and three absconders, impounded 13 vehicles while conducting 39 counter narcotics operations throughout the country during last week.

According to an ANF Headquarters spokesman, the seized drugs comprised 23,032 kg Heroin, 1531.140 kg Hashish, 67.9 kg Opium, 28,011 kg Methamphetamine (Ice), eight grams cocaine, 0.312 kg Ecstasy Tabs (530 tablets), 1.865 kg Xanax tabs (8320 tablets), 0.300 kg Valium Tabs (1065 tablets), eight grams caffeine and 1846 liters HCL.

ANF Balochistan recovered 1092.200 kg drugs and 1846 liters prohibited chemical in eight operations while arrested eight persons involved in drugs smuggling and impounded two vehicles. The seized drugs comprised 21 kg heroin, 1048.200 kg hashish, 23 kg Methamphetamine (Ice) and 1846 liters

HCL. ANF Punjab recovered 64.205 kg drugs in nine operations while arrested 11 persons including a woman involved in drugs smuggling and impounded five vehicles. The seized drugs comprised 1.5 kg Heroin, 58.400 kg Hashish, 300 grams opium, 3.6 kg methamphetamine (Ice), 150 grams weed, 190 grams ecstasy tabs (315 tablets) and 65 grams Xanax Tabs (480 Tablets).

ANF KPK recovered 42.140 kg drugs in five operations while arrested three persons involved in drugs smuggling and impounded a vehicle. The seized drugs comprised four kg Opium and 38.140 kg hashish.

ANF Sindh recovered 312.746 kg drugs, in seven operations while arrested 10 persons including three absconders involved in drugs smuggling and impounded a vehicle. The seized drugs comprised 309.5 kg hashish, 1.106 kg Methamphetamine (Ice), 1.8 kg xanax tabs (78400 Tablets), 300 grams valium tabs (1060 tablets) and 40 grams ecstasy tabs (75 tablets). INP

PTI challenges ECP schedule for by-polls on NA seats in KP

Peshawar: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf on Tuesday challenged the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) schedule for by-elections on three National Assembly seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

According to media reports, PTI lawyer filed an application with the Peshawar High Court (IHC), requesting the high court to suspend the election schedule.

The petition stated that ECP cannot hold by-polls 120 days before general elections. "The holding of by-polls on April 30 is violation of Article-124 of Constitution," it said. It also argued PTI lawmakers were not called by NA speaker for the verification of resignations.

The Election Commission of Pakistan has announced to hold by-elections for three constituencies of the National Assembly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on April 30. These constituencies include NA-22

Mardan, NA-24 Charsadda and NA-31 Peshawar.

According to the schedule, nomination papers can be submitted from Sunday to Tuesday. The revised list of candidates will be published on 4 April. Nomination papers can be withdrawn till 5 April. On 6 April, 2023, the final list of candidates will be released and they will be allotted election symbols, while polling will be held on 30th of next month.

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