

QUETTA VOICE

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Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir interacts with soldiers during a visit to Peshawar on Thursday.

COAS says illegal foreigners 'seriously affecting' Pakistan's security and economy, backs deportation drive

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir on Thursday backed the interim government's decision to deport illegal foreigners, saying that they were "seriously affecting Pakistan's security and economy."

According to a handout issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the army chief passed these remarks during a visit to Peshawar.

In November, the caretakers initiated a nationwide campaign to deport illegal foreign nationals, the majority of whom are Afghans. While the decision had prompted criticism from Afghanistan and several other quarters, the government refused to budge, insisting the move was not aimed at any particular ethnic group.

Of the more than four million Afghans living in Pakistan, the government estimates 1.7m are undocumented. So far, thousands of Afghans have returned home from the Torkham and Chaman border crossings.

Last week, while hearing petitions challenging the deportation drive, the Supreme Court had said Pakistan was bound to United Nations conventions protecting immigrants and issued notices to the government on the matter.

During a session with participants of the First National Workshop Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (NWKP-1) today, Gen Munir said: "Illegal foreigners were seriously affecting Pakistan's security and economy." "[The decision to repatriate them has been taken by the government in the interest of

Pakistan. Illegal foreigners are being repatriated to their countries in a humane and dignified manner as per the established norms," the military's media wing quoted him as saying.

The COAS further remarked that KP's "resolute support" to security forces had resulted in stability in the province and the materialisation of progress on projects of social economic development. He linked the prosperity of Pakistan with KP and emphasised that "nefarious designs of the forces inimical to peace and stability of Pakistan are being foisted through a synergistic and comprehensive strategy."

Gen Munir also highlighted the importance of economic growth and development in newly merged districts, the ISPR said.

Earlier, the army chief interacted with soldiers and lauded their "heroic and exemplary feats."

"The nation takes pride and acknowledges the accomplishments of its armed forces. Pakistan is destined to succeed and Pakistan Army will continue to undertake its selfless and sacred duty of safeguarding every inch of the motherland until last drop of blood, InshaAllah [God willing]," he vowed.

Earlier on arrival, the COAS was received by Peshawar Corps Commander and given a detailed briefing on the overall security situation, ongoing counter-terrorism operations, repatriation of illegal foreigners and socio-economic developments in the Newly Merged Districts, the ISPR statement said. **NewsDesk**

Camp Attack in Sohbat Pur Claims One Life, Injures 2 Policemen

From Our Correspondent:



One person lost his life, and two policemen sustained injuries in an assault on a laborers' camp in the Sohbat Pur district of Balochistan on Thursday. Unknown miscreants targeted the camp using explosive materials, resulting in the tragic demise of laborer Saddam Hussain, who succumbed to injuries while being transported to the hospital. The two policemen guarding the camp also suffered injuries in the attack.

The assailants managed to escape from the scene unhurt. Promptly responding to the incident, the police initiated an investigation.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Following the blast, security measures were intensified at the laborers' camp, reflecting the volatile situation in the region.

This incident adds to a series of attacks by miscreants targeting laborers in various parts of Balochistan, emphasizing the ongoing security challenges in the province.

The Assailants Escaped Unhurt From The Spot

Tragic Gas Leak Explosion Claims Life in Noshki

Haji Tayyab Yalanzai:



NOSHKI: Tragedy struck the Kili Sharif Khan area of Noshki as a woman lost her life in a devastating explosion caused by a gas leak in her house. Additionally, two women, a man, and a ten-year-old girl suffered severe injuries in the incident.

Accompanied by other NP leaders during his visit, Dr Baloch emphasized that the party, with support from the Mekan belt residents in the upcoming general elections, would make positive decisions for Govt of Port and the coastal population. He highlighted the significance of the coast, stating, "If Baloch is important today, it is because of this coast." Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch called on the caretaker provincial government to promptly address the payment of salaries for Pansi Fish Harbor Authority employees.

importance of gas safety measures within households.

Preliminary reports suggest that the explosion resulted from a gas leak, highlighting the need for heightened awareness and preventive measures to avert such incidents. Authorities are investigating to ascertain the specifics of the gas leak and the circumstances leading to the tragic explosion. The community is urged to remain vigilant about gas safety protocols to prevent similar accidents in the future.

Transport Leaders Urge Immediate Widening of Western Bypass Quetta

Mannan Mandokhail:



QUETTA: The President of the All Balochistan Transport Action Committee, Haji Habibullah Badizai, along with General Secretary Haji Mir Akbar Lahri and Vice President Haji Wali Khan Achakzai, have called for urgent measures. They insist on the widening of the Lakpas to Alamo Chowk Western Bypass Road, which has gained international recognition and witnesses heavy traffic around the clock.

Notably, significant travelers transporting various goods to Afghanistan frequently traverse this route. Moreover, the departure of passenger coaches from the Jahal's Noor coach base to cities like Quetta and Karachi exacerbates the congestion, making the journey from Lagpas take two to two

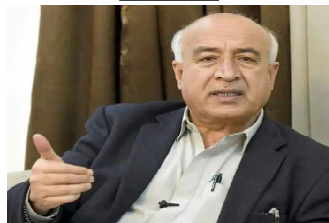
and a half hours during peak times.

The transport leaders highlight the daily occurrence of traffic accidents, attributing them to the rush and the poor condition of the single road, which has never undergone repairs. They emphasize that the ongoing congestion on the Western Bypass Road is a major contributor to the overall traffic issues in Quetta City.

In response to these challenges, the transporters have appealed for immediate attention and action from key authorities, including the Governor, Chief Minister of Balochistan, Corps Commander 12 Corps Balochistan, and particularly the National Highway Authority.

Massive Embezzlement Rock Pansi Fish Harbour Authority, Dr. Malik Raises Concerns

Behram Baloch:



GWADAR: Former Chief Minister of Balochistan, Dr. Malik Baloch, expressed serious concerns on Thursday regarding the alleged extensive embezzlement within the Pansi Fish Harbour Authority. The former CM, also Chief of the National Party (NP), engaged with the Harbour Authority's workers, pledging to address the alleged corruption and financial misconduct in Pansi.

Dr. Baloch's statement followed a protest initiated by Pansi Harbour Authority employees against the fisheries department, advocating for the acceptance of their demands.

"Govt Must Pay Salaries of Employees", Dr. Baloch

"This is a matter of shame;

the salaries of Pansi Harbour Authority workers must be disbursed," remarked Dr. Baloch. He urged authorities to thoroughly investigate irregularities and corruption within the Fish Harbour Authority.

Dr. Malik Baloch criticized both the provincial and federal governments, alleging their failure to address critical issues in the Mekan division.

"The National Party is committed to safeguarding your rights and the coastline," assured Dr. Baloch to Pansi's employees and residents.

NP To Protect Coast And Resources

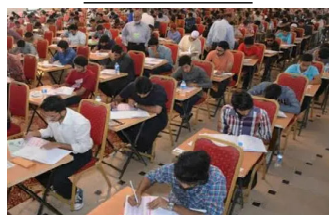
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BHC Rejects Petition Alleging Irregularities in MDCAT

Syed Muhammad Yaseen:

QUETTA: A two-member bench of the High Court of Balochistan, comprised of Mr. Justice Muhammad Kamran Khan Malakhail and Mr. Justice Shaukat Ali Rakhshani, rejected a petition alleging irregularities in the MDCAT tests conducted in Balochistan. The bench dismissed a constitutional petition filed by Palvasha Sherrani and others regarding the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT).

The petitioners argued that the MDCAT did not adhere to guidelines prescribed by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC). They contended that the test, intended to be conducted by the province of Balochistan, was instead administered by the unauthorized institute MUST, leading to alleged cheating through modern electronic devices. The petitioners further claimed that deserving candidates were denied their legal fundamental rights due to administrative lapses and called for the nullification of the test.



Counsel For Petitioners Allege Gross Illegality In Test

Muhammad Ishaq Nasir Advocate represented the petitioners, while Fahir Ali Baloch Advocate, Additional Advocate General Shaye Haq Baloch, and Sultan Khalid Advocate represented the government.

The counsel for the petitioners argued that gross illegality occurred during the test, including

paper leaks and challenging questions beyond the study modules' scope.

BUMHS Refuted The Allegations

In response, the counsel for Balochistan University of Medical and Health Sciences, Quetta (BUMHS), refuted the allegations, stating that they were unfounded and unproven by evidence. The university claimed that a committee had been formed to investigate the alleged scam, involving

only nine students, who did not object to the criteria, question papers, or examination procedure.

Open Seats Be Transferred To Open Merit: Bench Ordered

The BUMHS counsel emphasized that the green book, containing leaked questions was only three pages long and action had been taken against the student allegedly involved. They argued that complaints from MDCAT exam failures were invalid, as thousands of students had successfully cleared the exam. The counsel further asserted that the petitioners sought another chance to improve their results and that the admission process was at risk due to frivolous litigation, potentially causing a delay in the next academic session.

After hearing arguments from both parties and carefully examining the records and guiding principles, the Hon'ble Bench ordered that any vacant seats be transferred to the open merit quota if left unoccupied for any reason.

EDITORIAL

Editor: Asim Khan

Quetta's Cry for Clean Air: Urgent Action Needed Against Hazardous Crushing Plants

Editorial:

Quetta, the capital of the Balochistan province, finds itself in the grip of a severe crisis as crushing plants operating on its outskirts continue to pose an imminent threat to human life. These plants not only release toxic chemicals into the air but also contribute to water pollution, resulting in dire consequences for respiratory health and the overall ecosystem.

Alarming Rise of Respiratory and Allergy Diseases: Dr. Shireen Khan, a prominent chest physician, has sounded the alarm about the alarming rise in respiratory and allergy diseases, directly attributing them to the hazardous emissions from these crushing plants. Compounding the issue is the significant influence wielded by the owners of these plants, hindering necessary actions to safeguard public health.

A senior official from the Balochistan Environment Department, speaking on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, has acknowledged the influential role of the plant owners. This underscores the urgency for the government to intervene and address this critical issue that directly impacts the well-being of the citizens of Quetta, the capital of Balochistan.

Plants Dangerous For Ecosystem and Human Life: Environmentalists have labeled these crushing plants as extremely dangerous for both the ecosystem and human lives. Faiz Kakar, a former Balochistan health minister and environmentalist, emphasizes the urgent need for practical action, declaring that the hazardous plants must be sealed without further delay.

The citizens of Quetta have persistently demanded the closure of these stone-crushing plants, recognizing the imminent threat they pose to their health. It is crucial for the government to address the concerns of the masses and take decisive steps to address this pressing issue.

Sealing Plants Imperative For Public Health: While sealing these plants is imperative for public health, it is equally vital for the authorities to identify and relocate the crushing plants to areas that are safe for crushing. This move would not only mitigate the environmental impact but also safeguard the livelihoods of thousands of people currently employed in these plants.

In the face of the escalating health crisis and environmental degradation, we urge the government to prioritize the well-being of its citizens. The time for action is now, and the government must demonstrate its commitment to the health and safety of the people by swiftly addressing the issue of hazardous stone-crushing plants in the capital of Balochistan. The inaction of the government jeopardizes the well-being of future generations, making it imperative for the authorities to act responsibly and decisively.

Youth, a buzzword?

By Arooj Waheed Dar:

DECADES of consistently failing the youth of this country has led us to one conclusion: 'youth' needs to be more than a buzzword. As we approach the elections, almost every statement by political parties these days pertains to the youth. Yet, all politicians are conspicuous by their absence in these narratives are the policy actions these parties intend to implement to elevate the status of the youth. Hence, the key question arises: what really is the 'youth reforms agenda'?

Sure, you are planning on creating employment opportunities, but how? Of course, you want to improve access to education and health as well, but how? What magic lamp have you stumbled upon this time? In Pakistan, the term 'youth' has been ubiquitously employed but merely as a political buzzword, serving as a means for politicians to garner support from the substantial youth demographic. This superficial usage has resulted in significant disparities between the rhetoric aimed at the youth and the actual implementation of reforms, leading to notable gaps between the demand for and the supply of reforms.

Pakistan is in need of a youth-centric character of economy, which is designed by the youth and for the youth. For this, we need greater youth representation and participation in

policy-making areas. To achieve this, unveiling the suppressed and stifled young voices is imperative to ensure a convergence of expectations of the youth and the political reforms that politicians can bring. This endeavour necessitates a united commitment to engage in formulating and sharing with political representatives a concise five-point agenda for advancing youth development, working in tandem with the broader university student body. Additionally, webinars can be organized. They can serve as valuable opportunities to address a wide audience, including students, faculty members, and academic leadership, thereby creating a dynamic space for the exchange of ideas and solutions. In a recent collaboration with the World Bank, we invited young minds from across Pakistan to share their vision of a brighter, more prosperous Pakistan, in a utopian sense. The entries we received broadly focused on four main themes: education, female empowerment, green energy transition, and inclusion. While reviewing the entries, we saw that participants were predominantly talking about education in the context of skill development. This observation made us realize that at a broader level, the understanding is there that Pakistan is undergoing a human capital crisis.

What this means is bodies can actively participate in meaningful discussions by connecting with student representatives from diverse universities, thereby establishing a dedicated virtual youth forum for constructive dialogue and engagement. These student representatives can be engaged in formulating and sharing with political representatives a concise five-point agenda for advancing youth development, working in tandem with the broader university student body. Additionally, webinars can be organized. They can serve as valuable opportunities to address a wide audience, including students, faculty members, and academic leadership, thereby creating a dynamic space for the exchange of ideas and solutions. In a recent collaboration with the World Bank, we invited young minds from across Pakistan to share their vision of a brighter, more prosperous Pakistan, in a utopian sense. The entries we received broadly focused on four main themes: education, female empowerment, green energy transition, and inclusion. While reviewing the entries, we saw that participants were predominantly talking about education in the context of skill development. This observation made us realize that at a broader level, the understanding is there that Pakistan is undergoing a human capital crisis.

By F.S. Aljazuddin:

HEINZ Kissinger sloughed many skins in his 100-year-long life. He shed Henry to become Henry, his German ancestry to become an American, his original faith Judaism to become a flag Christian. He left Harvard academia to serve numerous US presidents (most notably Richard Nixon). Branded a 'war criminal' responsible for the deaths of over three million in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973 and then attempted to atone by returning it.

In his final years, he became a highly paid consultant — a 'diplomat for hire' — to world leaders. That clientele diminished as his contacts left office. They were augmented by corporate giants to whom Kissinger's maturity

could be all things to all men, and to women — especially Hollywood starlets whom he used as a camouflage when ever he wanted to distract the press from his actual amours. His enduring love affair himself was his wife Nancy, who survives him. Tearing over her, she maintained her delicate figure by having one post-fat denied him because of his foreign birth was the presidency of his adopted country, Mao Zedong

teasingly reminded Kissinger of this in Beijing in February 1972, taunting him that Nancy 'Tan' (Mao's) was eligible because she had been born in Brooklyn. Zhou Enlai could be equally pointed, responding to Kissinger's suggestion that they should continue to pass some non-substantive notes through President Yahya Khan's role in facilitating Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing in July 1971. Few know of Kissinger's in-

By Miftah Ismail:

THE caretaker government and the Privatisation Minister Fawad Hasan Fawad are trying to privatise some state-owned enterprises, particularly PIA. Mr Fawad, possibly the most competent bureaucrat of his generation, was persecuted by one side and felt abandoned by the other, in the ever-changing sides that is our politics.

Those opposed to the privatisation of PIA are casting aspersions that the privatisation minister and the caretaker government has put some hidden agenda with regard to PIA's privatisation. What agenda can they have? Let's review some numbers.

There are five airlines in Pakistan, four of them private. All charge about the same fare and provide the same level of service. Yet the four private airlines earn money and pay taxes. PIA, on the other hand, lost Rs88 billion last year on sales of Rs172bn. That's a 51 per cent loss on sales, a proportion of loss that's difficult to comprehend, even if one tries very hard.

The year before PIA lost Rs50bn. And the year before Rs35bn. The accumulated losses of PIA to date are Rs717bn, with a present value of over Rs900bn.

That amount, Rs900bn, is enough to

build 15 Aga Khan University Hospitals, enough to build 60 Lums universities, or enough to build 18,000 schools across Pakistan.

Instead, we have elected to continue with a loss-making enterprise that gives jobs to but 8,000 employees, never pays civil aviation dues and reluctantly pays PSO for its fuel. PIA has lost money under all governments and boards and after every single revival scheme conjured up by the airline and financed by a governmental grant.

In the last 15 years, the government has put Rs109bn directly into PIA and guaranteed banks loans of Rs265bn. We can estimate that we have lost money in PIA as we want, but the simple truth is that PIA is beyond repair.

The Pakistan economy would be much better off with privatisation of the airline quickly while ensuring the security of the employees.

Privatisation brings me to consider also our railway monopoly, the Pakistan Railways. Last year, in spite of years of government subsidies, they keep losing billions and repeatedly ask us to bail them out.

Our railway ministry, by running PR, works for the interests and not for consumers or taxpayers. However, instead of operating PR, its role should be redefined as a regulator for the industry. We should privatise both tracks and

trains to multiple operators, and the ministry working as a regulator, should set and enforce safety standards for tracks and trains, and set maximum charges track owners can charge trains and trains can charge for freight and passengers. And if there are efficiency and safety improvements required by the regulating ministry in tracks and trains, the private sector should do so with its own funds — to be compensated through fares — as a licensing requirement to own tracks and run trains.

Finally, the katchi abadis that have sprung up on PR lands should be given to the poor occupants and the remaining land can be sold to private developers. PR benefits for existing railway employees until retirement.

Let's now consider the Pakistan Steel Mills, which has been shut for eight years, with the employees still being paid. PSM owes over Rs100bn to National Bank and Sul Southern. A reasonable way to compensate for the loss, but not critically jeopardising the financial health of Sul Southern and NBP, would be to hand over PSM's remaining land to them. PSM started with 20,000 acres, with 5,000 acres for the mill, and the remaining for downstream

industries. After encroachment on about 2,000 acres, an industrial park of 1,500 acres, and an employees' housing society, there remains only about 8,000 acres. This land can then be sold by Sul Southern and NBP to partially recover their dues.

The steel mill itself, Russian-made of 1960s vintage, can still be selling or leasing it. However, the existing employees should continue to be paid till they retire. There is no better place for the caretaker government and SIF to reform the economy and improve our business climate than by privatising these three entities. Whereas privatisation of PIA and PSM will just stop the losses, the privatisation of PR will not just stem the losses but can also improve the overall improvement of the economy. New money poured into these SOEs will be wasted, as we have seen repeatedly. We need private-sector investors, and well-regulated markets, for SOEs to become profitable and finally be beneficial to consumers and taxpayers.

The privatisation agenda is to stem the losses and improve the economy. The baseless aspersions on ministers are just a way to derail the process.

The eternal return of Mr Dar

By Khurram Husain:

ONE question keeps coming up in all conversations about the shape and position of the economy. Will Ishaq Dar be the finance minister? Here is my answer: yes, he will, even if he doesn't formally occupy the position of finance minister, he will be such an overbearing presence that anybody else will find it impossible to operate outside of his wishes. Meaning that even if he is chairman Senate, or occupies any other such positions, his presence will still be felt in Q block.

There is a reason why Mr Dar keeps returning to this particular position whenever there is a PML-N government in power. One reason, obviously, is because he is related to Nawaz Sharif through the marriage of their children. But this is not the full explanation, and it certainly does not explain why Dar keeps returning to the finance ministry as opposed to any other position of power.

To understand why finance, it is necessary to understand how the economy has been stuck behind a stagnant 'production possibilities frontier' to use the language of introductory economics. What this means is

the country's economy is relying on the same industries year after year, decade after decade, to be the drivers of its growth, and in the process, sinking into a quagmire of low growth. Every year growth surges in the past quarter century has been shorter in duration, lesser in intensity, and perhaps requires larger inducements in the form of borrowed capital and accommodative monetary and fiscal policies.

There are two large options all policymakers have when they come to power and are confronted with an economy such as this one. One option is to try and 'bust out' through a reform programme that changes the relationship between state and capital, incentives investment in new areas where capital can be more productively employed and allows the sun to set on old industries that have lived long past their sell-by date.

Such a reform path is difficult to conceive, carries risks of failure, elicits opposition from vested interests opposed to a change in industry, meets bureaucratic lethargy, and brings short-term pain in the form of a rising tax burden and possible shutdowns in key industries, and so on. It is a tough path to walk.

The other option is to 'hunker down' and make effective ways to manage the growing scarcities as the economy sinks deeper and deeper into this unproductive quagmire. When in hunker down mode, the rulers eschew all attempts at change and seek to extract more from the system as it is. In this strategy, the ruler assumes the position of an all-powerful watchdog over the economy, keeping strict tabs on who is making how much, who is selling whom at what price, to whom, and so on.

This is the economy in which a sector shock and the ensuing sanctions. He managed the scarcities of foreign exchange and energy and fiscal resources in the days. But he failed totally at getting the IMF programme restarted, without which there was no hope of finding stability beyond the day to day.

In his second stint, from 2013 to 2017, he ran an economy with abundant access to foreign capital and a relatively relaxed geopolitical environment (compared to the late 1990s in any case). And growth under the late 1990s mode basically meant holding interest rates and the exchange rate constant, artificially so, while

pouring borrowed dollars in the billions into the economy year after year to produce a resource-intensive dynamic that ultimately ended in a crash. In 2022, he came back to 'hunker down' once again, to manage the scarcities, and distribute the losses among the business elites. He managed to persuade Nawaz Sharif that the finance minister was not hunkering down and the result was outrageous inflation that was fueling disaffection among the PML-N voters.

He arrested the slide in the exchange rate and held fuel prices constant as he could, but in the process, drew down the foreign exchange reserves and brought the country back to the brink of default by the end of the year. If there is a PML-N government in the next elections (assuming they are held), Dar will be there, either in the seat of a finance minister, or from some other perch, haranguing whoever is the finance minister to punt down and keep the economy under his thumb. The short-term costs of the 'bust out' approach will make it very difficult for anyone to take that course, while the short-term sense that hunkering down makes will prove too alluring to be ignored.

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"Policy," he once wrote, "is rooted in personality," and there was no one in the world during the struggle of the 1970s and 1980s who was not scared by Kissinger's combustible personality.

Zhou Enlai could be equally pointed, responding to Kissinger's suggestion that they should continue to pass some non-substantive notes through President Yahya Khan's role in facilitating Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing in July 1971. Few know of Kissinger's in-

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Silk Road Forum held, Pak, China to jointly promote people's well-being

BEIJING (INP): The forum "Benefiting All Mankind: Dialogues with the Silk Road" was held here, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Thursday. It was co-sponsored by the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies under China International Communications Group (CICG), the Pakistan-China Institute, the European Union Asia Centre, and the Cultural Communication Center of CICG.

Gao Anming, vice-president and editor-in-chief of CICG, and Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Chairman of Pakistan's Senate Defence Committee and Pakistan-China Institute, attended the meeting and delivered speeches. Twelve Chinese and

foreign think tank experts, including Pakistani expert on international studies, Abdur Rahman, delivered keynote speeches on the theme of "Inheriting the Silk Road Culture, Jointly Promoting People's Well-being".

Gao pointed out that over the past 10 years, the Belt and Road Initiative has brought China and its partner countries closer together, and has deepened exchanges and mutual understanding among different civilizations.

"Rooted in history and looking to the future, BRI has harnessed the synergy of civilizations to foster the development of a community with a shared future for mankind," said Gao.

Mushahid stated that BRI is the most significant initiative of the 21st century, lifting 400 million people out of poverty globally, primarily through flagship projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

"As a new platform for international cooperation, BRI will achieve a more open development prospect based on the principle of planning together, building together, and benefiting together."

"Currently, the narratives of the East and the West are significantly different. In a multipolar world, we need a diverse response. China and Pakistan are good friends who are working together to promote the BRI towards a better future," Mushahid added.

In his keynote speech, Abdur emphasized that BRI has helped modernize Pakistan by creating numerous job opportunities and improving people's well-being under CPIC.

Pakistan's capable of effectively managing the regional situation and achieving safer and more cohesive development.

Meanwhile, we should strengthen the influence of social media and the availability of intellectual products, while also enhancing institutional connectivity to facilitate better people-to-people exchanges and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes," said Abdur.

At the meeting, a research report on "Chinese Modernization and Jointly Building the BRI with South Asian Countries" was released.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi speaking to the students of Balochistan Residential College, Jorali, during an interactive session at Alwam-e-Sadr.

President stresses to adopt drip, spray irrigation system to avert water crisis

ISLAMABAD (INP): President Dr. Arif Alvi has stressed the need of adopting smarter and less water-intensive practices like drip and spray irrigation in agriculture to avert the looming crisis of water shortage.

He said that the agriculture sector consumes approximately 95 percent of the country's water, which needs immediate planning and reforms on water use efficiency.

Dr. Arif Alvi in a video-link address to the international conference on "Transformative pathways for water and food systems in a climate resilient Pakistan" held in Karachi, said that the country needed effective management to secure its existing water resources.

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Climate Change and UNICEF organized the event at-

tended by international and local water experts.

President Alvi said Pakistan ranked among the top 10 countries worldwide most affected by climate change and natural disasters.

He pointed out that the water crisis being faced by Pakistan was one of the most pressing challenges, aggravated due to rapid population growth, urbanization, industrialization, depletion of water resources, environmental deterioration, climate change, and irrational human behaviour.

The president emphasized research and technological innovation to promote modern agricultural technologies at grassroots level.

He said there was a need to educate farmers about water conservation, rain-water harvesting, and aquifer technologies.

Community involvement and implementation of laws could prove helpful in effective water management, he added.

The president mentioned that Pakistan's farmers were dependent on conventional methods of food irrigation,

which wasted water while the world practiced drip and spray irrigation and recycling of water.

Crop substitution, he said, could make a difference if farmers choose crops that were less expensive on water.

He proposed research on using rice grain which grew on less water and produced high yield.

"We should adopt the technology that can handle the water scarcity and improve food sustainability," he said.

The president referred to the example of The Netherlands, which is 19 times smaller than Pakistan in land mass, but is the second-largest exporter of food products. With water conservation, vertical farming, planet control farming, and hydroponic farming, a small country can produce more yield per acre, he added.

Dr. Alvi stressed attitudinal change to adopt the ways of water usage which were inexpensive and technically better. He said water pricing in agriculture and urban was necessary to avoid waste of water.

The president said besides the external Indus water treaty with India, Pakistan had an internal provincial water distribution arrangement that needed improvement.

"We have to improve the telemetry system and develop a confidence-building system among provinces on judicious use of water," he said. Also, satellite telemetry can be used to know the actual water flow towards provinces.

He said Pakistan is endowed with 158 million acre-feet of water per annum and the tube wells in Punjab supply 12 million acre-feet of the commodity.

He pointed out that water pumping had affected the levels of the aquifer and stressed the need for modes to recharge the traditional aquifers to avoid its depletion. "A whole-of-the-society approach is needed to be adopted right from childhood on caring for the environment. Pakistan needs both mitigation and adaptation as important tools to increase water storage to meet its needs," he said.



DHAKA: High Commissioner for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Bangladesh Syed Ahmed Maroof presenting his credentials to the President of Bangladesh Mohammed Shahabuddin, at the Presidential Palace.

Don't pay attention to rumours, election schedule to be shared within days: CEC

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikander Sulkan Raja on Thursday promised blanket security to the voters and said general elections would be held on February 8, 2024 - the date announced earlier for the democratic exercise.

In a message on the National Voters Day, Raja said the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was cognizant of the constitutional and legal responsibilities,

adding that they were ready for organising free, fair and peaceful polls in the country.

"I assure you that complete protection would be provided to you during election so that you can exercise your right to vote with full secrecy and transparency," he said and added that it was not only their right but also a duty.

Raja added that the ECP was set to announce the election schedule in the next few days besides also notifying the district returning officers (DROs), returning officers (ROs) and assistant returning officers (AROs).

Earlier on Tuesday, the ECP had vehemently dismissed social media allegations of registering fake votes in ghost constituencies, including Murree and others, to favour a specific political party.

A spokesperson in a statement warned against making irresponsible statements and noted that the ECP reserved the right to take appropriate action against the quarters and individuals involved in the propaganda.

The CEC's statement came just days after JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman talked about the challenges faced by certain political parties amid worsening law and order in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

Karachi's Arshi Shopping Mall inferno death toll rises to five

KARACHI (INP): The death toll in Karachi's Arshi Shopping Mall inferno jumped to five as the rescue teams have found another body during clearance operation on Thursday.

The incident occurred in Karachi's Ayesha Manzil where fire erupted in shops and quickly expanded to residential flats on Wednesday evening.

The body was retrieved from the first floor of the shopping mall and was shifted to the Burns Ward of Civil Hospital.

The fire was doused by the rescue workers after hours of struggle.

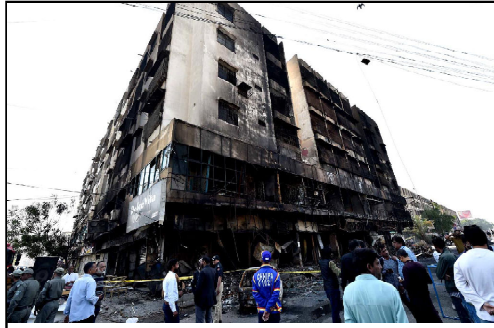
Mayor Karachi Muratza Wahab said the authorities will estimate the losses once the fire brigade officials complete the process.

"The affected building is at risk of collapse anytime" warned 1122 officials and urged the people to stay away from premises of the building for their safety.

Rescue 1122 has confirmed the safe evacuation of 300 individuals from the affected building. Fortunately, no damage has been reported to nearby structures. 1122 officials stated that the firefighting and cooling process is being carried out simultaneously.

Following the incident, Mayor Karachi Muratza Wahab decided to conduct safety audit of all major buildings across the city. Wahab in a statement - said that he will first of all direct the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner to closely monitor the situation at the site of the incident. Karachi Mayor Muratza Wahab emphasized that the primary focus is on saving human lives, though the exact number of people trapped remains uncertain. The development comes days after 11 people were killed when a huge fire engulfed R.J. Shopping Mall at Karachi's Rashid Minhas Road.

He regretted that no emergency evacuation routes were built in majority of the buildings in Karachi. "Action will be taken against responsible, if there are no safety exit in huge buildings," he added.



KARACHI: Police officers gather outside a cordoned off multi-story commercial building, which was ablaze Wednesday night, in Karachi.



RAWALPINDI: Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Khazar Farhadov called on Federal Minister for Defence, Lt Gen Anwar Ali Hyder III (M), (Retd.).

Interfaith harmony mandatory for country's development, prosperity: Dr Abdullah

LAHORE (INP): Punjab University Acting Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr Abdullah Khan Durani has said that interfaith harmony holds key importance for development and prosperity of Pakistan.

He was addressing the Christmas cake cutting ceremony organized by Punjab University's Aman Ethad Committee at Faisal Auditorium here on Thursday. On this occasion, former minister Bilal Yasin, Resident Officer Muhammad Kashif Nazir, President PUI Administrative and Technical Staff Association Chairman Mehmoode, Chairman Christian Ethad Aman Committee Chaudhry Mushtaq Mash, administrative officers, faculty members and a large number of Christian employees and their family members were present.

Prof. Dr Abdullah Khan Durani, while extending Christmas greetings to the Christian community, said that we

support the minorities in all matters. He said that we all can get the country out of crisis only with unity.

He announced to give three thousand rupees to each Christian employee on the occasion of Christmas.

Former minister Bilal Yasin congratulated the Christian employees on Christmas. He assured that 15% and 44% allowances will be given to the employees of Punjab University.

He said that if he gets the chance to serve again, he will resume the journey of public service. Dr Ahmed Islam said that PUI is taking steps for the development of employees including sanitary workers.

Chairman Christian Ethad Aman Committee Chaudhry Mushtaq Mash said that we are grateful to the university administration, employees and faculty members for sharing the joy of Christmas with us. He said that all employees in Punjab University live with love, affection and

respect. He said that we play a role for the establishment of peace in Pakistan and will continue to do so.

TENDER NOTICE

The BAECC invites bids from eligible bidders for supply of following items: **TSE-2324/1163161** Note: In All Procurements of GOB Whether through Electronic or Manual Bid Submission, It is Mandatory For All Bidders to Get Registered At Electronic Public Procurement System of BPPRA GOB.

S.No	Class of Object	Title	Qty
1	Stationery/Tools/Items	Count: 1	100%- 2%

Procurements shall be made under the Balochistan Public Procurement Rules - 2014. **Eligibility of Bidders:** Assignments of Similar Nature and Complexity: 150,000 in Previous 2. Turn over of at least 2,000,000 PKR in 2 subsequent previous years. Presence in Active Tax Payer List. Sales Tax Certificate. The bidding firm must not be currently blacklisted by any procuring agency of Pakistan. It is not permissible. Submission of the required Bid Security In case Bid Security is not found as required during financial evaluation the bidding firm shall be declared as ineligible and non-responsive. Submission of the required bidding document. **Fee Procedure of Procurement:** Single Stage Two Envelope Bidding Procedure: Bid Security. The bids must accompany Bid Security in the form of Demand Draft of 2% specified above in the name of the undersigned from a scheduled bank. **Tender Documents:** The bidding documents can be obtained from the office of the undersigned 1,000 PKR issuance of tender Documents: From the date of publication of NT to 18 December, 2023 during office hours on working days. Last Date of bid submission: The bidders must be submitted latest by 18 December, 2023 at 11:00 AM. **Tender opening:** All tenders will be opened on same day at the office of the undersigned at 12:00 PM. Address: Chairman of Balochistan Assessment & Examination Commission Shaukhatia Road Quetta. Phone no: 3451937929 Email: baec@baec2015@gmail.com

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ustainable policies to promote investment in Pakistan: EU Ambassador

ISLAMABAD (INP): Ambassador and Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan, Dr. Rina Kwonka, has said that Pakistan is a potential market for business and investment activities and it should focus on sustainable economic policies to attract more foreign investment.

She said this while talking to a delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) led by its President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari that called on her on Thursday. Piotr BUSZTA, First Counsellor, Head of Political, Trade and Communication Section of EU to Pakistan were also present on the occasion.

Dr. Rina Kwonka said that the EU is the biggest export destination for Pakistan and that Pakistani exporters should take full advantage of the EU's GSP Plus to further improve their exports. She said that the EU supports Pakistan's integration into the global

economy by furthering bilateral trade, promoting direct investment, and supporting institution building. The Ambassador further stated that the EU also supports Pakistan's ongoing economic reform agenda in consultation with the international financial institutions. The EU is planning to expand its dialogue and cooperation with Pakistan in addressing its energy issues. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the EU's apparel import market was valued at over \$191 billion in 2022 while Pakistan is a major exporter of apparel. He stressed that the EU should import more textile products from Pakistan which would help boost industrialization in Pakistan and revive our economy.

The President ICCI thanked the EU parliament for extending the EU's GSP Plus scheme to Pakistan until 2027 and hoped that it would create new opportunities

for Pakistani exporters to enhance exports. He said that SIFC is working to create a conducive environment for foreign investors in Pakistan and stressed that more EU investors should explore Pakistan for business and investment. Faad Wahsed, Senior Vice President ICCI said that the EU is the world's largest trading bloc and Pakistan also wants to promote regional trade in South Asia. He said that the EU should share its experience with Pakistan in promoting a strong regional trading bloc in South Asia.

Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that the EU countries should start direct flights with Pakistan to facilitate the promotion of bilateral trade and exports. He said that both sides should explore opportunities to expand and enhance existing trade agreements or negotiate new ones to boost economic ties.



QUETTA: IG Police Balochistan Abdul Khaliq Sheikh is giving a police commemorative shield to DG NAB Balochistan Zafar Iqbal Khan and DG Anti-Corruption Balochistan Abdul Wahid Kakar in a seminar organized regarding the International Anti-Corruption Day.

PTDC committed to promote tourism via modern initiatives: Official

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) is committed to promote the country's tourism through modern initiatives and by marketing the country's natural landscape, history, culture and archaeological sites to facilitate the tourists.

The PTDC was planning to develop Tourism Application to inform the foreign and local tourists for easy access about their destination, said a PTDC official on Thursday.

He said the corporation has already established the Tourist Information Centers (TIC) at various airports to provide accurate information to the tourists, adding that it was also planning to set up a modern TIC at new International Gwadar airport to facilitate the tourists by

providing comprehensive information regarding recreational spots of the province.

The official said, "PTDC is projecting the country as a tourist friendly destination in bringing Pakistan amongst top five tourist destinations of Asia and marketing of tourist places at home and abroad through tourism shows and exhibitions to generate revenues."

Tourism sector was contributing a lot to the national exchequer as well, he said adding that PTDC was developing infrastructure and services within the country to facilitate the tourists.

He said, "PTDC, with the collaboration of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) has kicked off an effective cleanliness campaign at different parks

of the federal capital to ensure neat and clean environment to attract numerous tourists in a healthy ambiance."

The official said that launching of the campaign was aimed to ensure clean environment.

He urged the tourists to maintain cleanliness at tourist spots of the capital city as people from various parts of the country throng to the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi for recreation and tourism purposes.

It is pertinent to mention here that a large number of tourists including locals and foreign dignitaries are visiting the country's recreational sites to enjoy a pleasant and lovely weather besides the peaceful atmosphere.

Junaid Jamshed remembered on seventh death anniversary

ISLAMABAD (INP): The seventh death anniversary of preacher turned Pakistani pop star, Junaid Jamshed was observed by his fans on Thursday.

The fans paid rich tributes to the departed soul through media platforms and recalled his favorite memories in their own way.

Born in Karachi on Sept 3, 1964, Junaid Jamshed briefly worked as a civilian contractor and engineer for Pakistan Air Force before turning into a singer.

He formed a pop music band 'Vital Signs' and also led the band as a singer. The band gained immense worldwide popularity during the 90s, with their songs like "Aktebaar", "Goray Rang ka Zaman", "Dil Ki Baat", "Dil Dil Pakistan" and "Sanwali Salon", electronic media channels reported.

Junaid's singing career was booming and he toured the whole world to show his talent in live concerts, but after entertaining the pop music lovers for 15 years, in 2004 Junaid officially left the music industry at the peak of his career and reconnected to his Islamic faith.

As early as 1999, media had been speculating about Junaid's drift from music, soon after the 'Vital Signs' faded away. The speculations soon died after Junaid released his single albums in merely two years and continued world tours. After 2001, Jamshed disappeared from the public eye and avoided media attention. Over the years, Junaid stays distant from Hyatt who continued to work on producing music.

In 2003, BBC World Service conducted an unscientific poll to

choose ten most famous songs of all time. Around 7,000 songs were selected from all over the world.

According to BBC, people from 155 countries/territories voted in the poll. "Dil Dil Pakistan" was ranked third among the top 10 songs.

In 2004, Jamshed officially renounced music and engineering after announcing that he would devote his life to Islam.

In 2007, the government of Pakistan awarded him Iqbal-e-Imtiaz. He went on a mission of preaching the religion to the residents of Chitral where he died in a horrible crash when PIA flight PK-661 of aircraft ATR-42 turboprop plane crashed near Havenan with 47 passengers and crew members on board along with Junaid Jamshed and his wife.



QUETTA: Caretaker Provincial Health Minister Dr. Ameer Khan Jogezaei is distributing shields to the participants of the event organized regarding the International Human Rights Day.



KOHAT: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar addresses the 88th annual Parents' Day ceremony in Cadet College Kohat, Kohat.

Pakistan Water Week 2023: Water Festival and Technology Fair kicks off

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistan Water Week 2023 kicked off with an auspicious inauguration ceremony of Water Festival and Technology Fair on December 7th, 2023, in Islamabad. Organized by the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), in collaboration with IWMI Pakistan and UNICEF and various partner organizations, the event aims to address the critical challenges surrounding water resources and promote innovative solutions in the field of water and climate.

Federal Minister, Ministry of Water Resources, Mr. Ahmad Irfan Aslam who graced the inauguration ceremony, marked the commencement of an eventful week dedicated to addressing the pressing water issues faced by the nation.

The Technology Fair featured stalls set up by leading research and development organizations in the water sector and universities. Minister Aslam took the time to visit each stall, where representatives from PCRWR, IWMI, UNICEF, Islamic Relief, WWF and other international agencies, academia, and indus-

try provided detailed briefings on their groundbreaking technologies and ongoing research initiatives aimed at tackling water related challenges.

Furthermore, Minister Aslam engaged with students participating in the poster competition, where young minds showcased their innovative ideas and projects related to water conservation and management.

The students passionately explained their poster themes, offering the minister valuable insights into the next generation's commitment to addressing water issues.

At this occasion Minister Water Resources, Mr. Ahmad Irfan Aslam also launched the recent research reports of PCRWR based on its groundbreaking work related to water awareness, research, and technological advancements. Minister Aslam inaugurated the festival, symbolizing the government's commitment to addressing the pressing water issues faced by the nation.

The Technology Fair featured stalls set up by leading research and development organizations in the water sector and universities. Minister Aslam took the time to visit each stall, where representatives from PCRWR, IWMI, UNICEF, Islamic Relief, WWF and other international agencies, academia, and indus-

Minister Aslam commended the organizers for their initiative in hosting such a significant event, shedding light on public awareness and providing a platform for research and development organizations to showcase their efforts. He particularly appreciated the active participation of youth, emphasizing the role of young minds in driving positive change. Minister Aslam encouraged the youth to actively participate in similar events, fostering a sense of responsibility and commitment to addressing the challenges posed by water scarcity.

During the day, Mr. Farhan Ahmad, Assistant Commissioner Islamabad City visited the Water Festival and Technology Fair. He visited the stalls installed by various organizations. The stall organizers briefed about their technology and research products to the Assistant Commissioner. He appreciated the efforts of PCRWR and its partners to organize such an event for public awareness and showcasing technology innovators their products.

Pakistan Water Week 2023 stands as a testament to the nation's dedication to finding sustainable solutions for water-related issues, with the hope that collaborative efforts will pave the way for a water-secure future.

During his speech, Minister Aslam emphasized the importance of water for sustaining life. Citing alarming projections, he expressed concern over reports suggesting that by 2070, the Indus River could run dry, posing a severe threat to the region's ability to sustain life. The minister emphasized the need for collective efforts to conserve and manage water resources effectively.



QUETTA: Caretaker Federal Information Minister, Murtaza Solangi arrives in Quetta: Photo provided by DGPR

Pakistan unequivocally condemns consistent use of force by Israel in Gaza: FO

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan welcomes the decision of United Nations Secretary General to invoke Article-99 of the UN Charter to bring attention of the UN Security Council towards the dire security situation and humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch at her weekly media briefing in Islamabad on Thursday said that this decision of the Secretary General demonstrates his conscientious assessment of the catastrophic situation in Gaza.

She said Pakistan strongly and unequivocally condemns the continuous use of force by Israel and its indiscriminate acts on civilians, civilian facilities and infrastructure in a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said as the Secretary-General has underscored in his letter to the President of the UN Security Council that 'civilians throughout Gaza face grave danger' and 'nowhere is safe in Gaza'. There is a severe risk of collapse of the humanitarian lifeline essential for survival.

She said the situation is fast deteriorating with potentially irreversible implications for Pales-

time and for peace and security in the region. Such an outcome must be avoided at all costs.

The Spokesperson said we join the UN Secretary General in his call to the international community to end the ongoing situation and avert a humanitarian catastrophe. She said the UN Security Council must perform its primary responsibility under the UN Charter, impose an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and protect the people of Gaza from an impending genocide.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said we call on Israel backers to urge Israel to end its barbaric attacks and inhuman siege against Gaza.

She said that durable peace in the region will emerge from the internationally agreed two-state solution and from the creation of a secure, viable, contiguous and sovereign state of Palestine on the basis of pre-June 1967 borders with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Turning to Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, the Spokesperson said the Wednesday's decision by the Indian Parliament to pass a legisla-

tion pertaining to the future of illegally Indian Jammu and Kashmir is yet another face to perpetuate India's occupation and to deny the people of Jammu and Kashmir their right to self-determination.

She said Jammu and Kashmir is an internationally-recognized disputed territory, whose final disposition is to be made in accordance with the United Nations Security Council resolutions and as per the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. Any other process cannot serve as a substitute to the right of self-determination of the Kashmiri people.

Mumtaz Zahra said Pakistan has never recognized India's occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. It has reportedly rejected the relevance of the Indian Constitution to this disputed territory. We therefore, categorically reject any measures that perpetuate India's occupation.

She said Pakistan will continue to extend political, diplomatic and moral support to our Kashmiri brothers and sisters for the just and peaceful settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions.