

QUETTA VOICE

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Armed forces to be deployed outside ‘most sensitive’ polling stations: ECP

News Desk: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday said the armed forces would be deployed outside the “most sensitive polling stations” during general elections on February 8.

The announcement came two days after the caretaker federal cabinet approved the deployment of army personnel.

In a notification, a copy of which is available with Dawn.com, the commission said it was its duty to organise elections and make arrangements “to ensure that the election is conducted honestly, justly, fairly and in accordance with law and that corrupt practices are quashed and averted”.

It said the ECP had obtained the services of the armed forces for assistance in ensuring security arrangements for the conduct of the general elections. The notification detailed the responsibilities of the armed forces during the polls.

“Pakistan armed forces/civil armed forces shall assist in the provision of a secure environment by deploying in Quick Reaction Force mode and outside selected most sensitive polling stations from Feb 5 to Feb 10 to assist the ECP in conduct of free, fair and transparent elections,” the electoral watchdog said.

The civil armed forces, it continued, would remain deployed at the Printing Corporation of Pakistan and Pakistan Post



Foundation — both in Islamabad — from Jan 12 to Feb 8 to make “comprehensive arrangements during the printing, stacking and storage of ballot papers”.

The election commission said the armed and civil armed forces should provide assistance in security during the transportation of ballot papers and election material from printing presses to respective offices of district returning officers.

The ECP notification further specified that the armed forces should provide assistance in the form of mobile vigilance teams across all constituencies, forming

a “tiered security mechanism” to ensure a secure environment. In this system, the police would function as tier-1 responders, followed by civil armed forces at tier-2, and the army at tier-3, the ECP added.

It also said that the armed forces should carry out reconnaissance from the date of issuance of the notification as per their need.

“The armed forces shall also provide security during transportation of election material from offices of returning officers to polling stations and back, after completion of polling and counting,” the notification stated.

The ECP added that it had also authorised each designated officer-in-charge of armed forces and civil armed forces to exercise powers of magistrate first class for the entire period of deployment at the office of the Municipal Commissioner under Sections 176, 177, 183 and 194 of the Elections Act 2017.

On Tuesday, the government approved a summary pertaining to the deployment of military and civil armed forces personnel at polling stations and sensitive constituencies “in order to maintain peace and security” during the upcoming general elections.

‘Credible evidence’ of links between Indian agents and assassination of 2 Pakistanis: foreign secretary

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Secretary Muhammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi on Thursday said Islamabad had “credible evidence” of links between Indian agents and the assassination of two Pakistani nationals in Sialkot and Rawalakot.

Qazi was referring to the deaths of two Pakistanis, identified as Shahid Latif and Muhammad Riaz, in 2023. Similar allegations regarding the Indian government’s involvement in murders in other countries were also made by the US and Canada last year.

At a press briefing in Islamabad today, the foreign secretary said India was running a “sophisticated and sinister” campaign of “extra-territorial and extra-judicial killings” inside Pakistan. He stated that these were “killing-for-hire cases” and involved a “sophisticated international spread over multiple jurisdictions”.

“Indian agents used technology and safe havens on foreign



soil to commit assassinations in Pakistan. They recruited, financed and supported criminals, terrorists and unsuspecting civilians to play defined roles in these assassinations,” he said.

According to Qazi, Indian media and social media accounts immediately claimed and glorified these killings as “successful retribution against enemies of India and projected their capacity to carry out these illegal acts”.

He said potential assassins

were recruited using social media, talent spotters and fake Daesh accounts. “Teams of financiers, recruiters and assassins were employed in the operation,” Qazi stated, adding that deliberate exit plans were also developed to obscure all potential tracks.

Revealing details about the assassinations, he said: “On October 11, 2023, Mr Shahid Latif was assassinated outside a mosque in Sialkot. A detailed investigation revealed that an In-

dian agent, Yogesh Kumar, based in a third country, orchestrated the assassination.”

Qazi said Kumar recruited Muhammad Umair, a labourer in the third country, to act as a contact with local criminals in Pakistan to trace and assassinate Shahid Latif. “They recruited local criminals who were able to locate and trade Shahid Latif, however, they were unable to carry out the execution.”

“After some of the failed attempts, Umair himself was personally sent to Pakistan to carry out the assassination,” the foreign secretary said, adding that Umair organised a team of five target killers and succeeded in assassinating Shahid Latif.

“Based on the confessional statements and technical evidence, law enforcement authorities quickly apprehended the target killers, including Muhammad Umair, who were trying to flee the country on Oct 12, 2023,” Qazi said.

Blast In Dera Bugti Leaves 2 Brothers Of Tribal Elder Injured

From Our Correspondent:

DERA BUGTI: An explosion rocked Landau Nala, a suburb of Sai in Dera Bugti, resulting in injuries to two brothers of a prominent tribal leader, according to sources from the Levies force.

The incident, which occurred earlier today, has raised concerns about the safety and security of the district. The Levies sources, while confirming the injuries, have not yet determined the nature of the explosion. It remains unclear whether it was a remote-controlled blast or caused by a landmine.

The injured individuals are currently being swiftly transported to a nearby hospital for medical attention, the Levies sources added.

Local authorities are actively investigating the incident to ascertain the cause and cir-



cumstances surrounding the explosion.

The Daily Quetta Voice will continue to closely monitor developments in this situation and provide updates as more information becomes available.

Maryam says rivals have no performance to show to public



News Desk: Chief Organiser of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Maryam Nawaz Sharif, asserted on Thursday that the party’s political rivals were engaging in criticism and blame games due to their inability to showcase their government’s performance.

In an apparent reference to the Pakistan Peoples Party’s (PPP) election activities in Punjab, Maryam stated, “a political party that ruled a province for 15 years and cannot show 15 projects have come to Punjab and are criticising Nawaz Sharif”.

The political landscape is intensifying as the country approaches its 12th general elections — scheduled for February 8.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari recently held a power show in Lahore, where he criticised “traditional and old”

politicians.

Maryam Nawaz responded today, addressing a rally in Lahore’s NA-199 constituency, claiming that the PML-N has actively contributed to the country’s development while others indulge in critique and blame games.

Recalling her past persecution for standing by her father, three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Maryam emphasised the party’s commitment to lowering utility bills if elected in the upcoming elections.

As political leaders intensify their rhetoric, Maryam urged voters to cast their votes wisely, asserting that the decision would shape the future for generations to come.

She assured that her family would remain in the country, emphasising her dedication to Pakistan’s progress.

Police Officer Killed in Shooting Outside Election Commissioner’s Office in Turbat, Balochistan

Ibrar Ahmed:



TURBAT: A police officer deployed outside the office of the Regional Election Commissioner in Turbat, Balochistan, was fatally shot by unknown armed motorcycleists on Thursday. The martyred officer has been identified as Nimroz S/o Sher Muhammad R/o Miri Kalag, Kech.

According to reports, two attackers riding a motorcycle approached the officer’s post this afternoon and opened fire. Nimroz sustained critical inju-

ries and was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he unfortunately succumbed to his wounds.

The attackers managed to flee the scene immediately after the shooting. Security forces have cordoned off the area and launched a search operation to apprehend the perpetrators.

The motive behind the attack is still unknown.

The incident has sparked outrage and condemnation from various officials and com-

munity leaders. Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Domki expressed his condolences to the family of the deceased officer and vowed to bring the perpetrators to justice.

“This cowardly attack on a police officer protecting our democratic institutions is unacceptable,” Domki said in a statement. “We will use all available resources to track down the attackers and ensure they face the full weight of the law.”

The police have also issued a statement, urging anyone with information about the attackers to come forward. They have assured anonymity and protection to any witnesses.

The shooting has raised concerns about the security of election officials and personnel involved in the upcoming local government elections in Balochistan. The Election Commission of Pakistan has announced that it will review security arrangements in light of this incident.

Five Labourers Abducted in Hoshab, Balochistan

Mir Salam Jogezi:



QUETTA: Five labourers were abducted by unknown armed men in the Dandar Bazar area of Hoshab Kech district, Balochistan, on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, at approximately 6:20 PM.

According to reports, the abducted individuals have been identified as Nazir Ahmed, Farooq Muhammad Tariq, Safdar, and Hasnan. All five hail from Punjab province.

Motive Unclear

The motive behind the abduction remains unclear, and authorities are currently investigating the incident. The Station House Officer (SHO) of Hoshab, along with his team, has been dispatched to the site to gather evidence and conduct a thorough investigation.

“We are working diligently to locate the missing individuals and ensure their safe return,” said a

spokesperson for the Balochistan police. “We are treating this incident with the utmost seriousness and are exploring all possible angles.”

Abduction Caused Concerns

The abduction has caused concern among the local community, particularly as it comes amid ongoing security challenges in the area. Balochistan has witnessed several incidents of violence and targeted attacks in recent months.

It is important to note that at this time, the details surrounding the abduction are limited, and the information provided is based on initial reports. As the investigation progresses, further details may emerge.

This is a developing story. We will update this article as more information becomes available.

OPINION

Editor: Asim Khan

Wisdom and Vision: Shaping Balochistan's Future in the 2024 Elections

Editorial:

As the political landscape of Balochistan gears up for the upcoming general elections on February 8, 2024, the province finds itself at a crucial juncture, facing multifaceted challenges that demand careful consideration and thoughtful decision-making from its residents.

Maulana Fazal ur Rehman's decision to contest the elections in NA-265 comes at a time when the political dynamics in Dera Ismail Khan are undergoing significant changes, with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) gaining momentum. The pressures and challenges in his home city have compelled the Chief of Jamiat ul Ulama e Islam (JIU) to step into the political arena, presenting a unique opportunity for voters to evaluate his vision for addressing the issues faced by the region.

Akhbar Mengal, Mehmood Achakzai, Dr. Malik Baloch, Jam Kamal, Nawab Aslam Raisani Contesting Elections

Balochistan, with its vast and diverse population, is home to leaders with distinct political affiliations. Mehmood Khan Achakzai of Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), Sardar Akhtar Jam Mengal of Balochistan National Party (BNP), Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch of National Party (NP), former Chief Ministers, Nawab Muhammad Aslam Raisani, Jam Kamal Khan, Nawab Sanaullah Zehri, Sardar Saleh Bhoonani, Khushal Khan Kakar of Pakhtunkhwa National Awami Party (PNAP), and Maulana Muhamed Khan Sherani of Jamiat ul Ulama e Islam Pakistan are among the prominent figures contesting in this crucial election.

The province, however, grapples with persistent challenges, ranging from backwardness and a sense of deprivation to issues related to education, health, and the impending threat of climate change. The candidates must not only articulate their plans for tackling these issues but also demonstrate a commitment to fostering unity and collaboration to bring about positive change.

The Elected Leaders Must Prioritize Inclusive Policies

Backwardness and a sense of deprivation have long plagued Balochistan, hindering its progress and development. The elected leaders must prioritize inclusive policies that bridge the gaps between urban and rural areas, ensuring equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

Education and health are fundamental pillars of societal development. The candidates should present comprehensive plans for improving the education system, ensuring access to quality healthcare, and addressing the specific needs of Balochistan's diverse population.

Looming Threat Of Climate Change Poses A Significant Threat To The Province

Furthermore, the looming threat of climate change poses a significant challenge to the province. Elected leaders must advocate for sustainable policies to protect the environment, support local communities, and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on agriculture and livelihoods.

In this critical moment, voters hold the power to shape the future of Balochistan and contribute to the progress of Pakistan as a whole. It is incumbent upon them to carefully evaluate the candidates' platforms, assess their commitment to addressing the pressing issues, and choose leaders who can navigate the complexities of governance with wisdom and integrity.

The forthcoming elections provide an opportunity for Balochistan to rise above political divides and work towards a future that prioritizes the welfare of its people. By making a wise decision at the ballot box, voters can contribute to building a stronger, more prosperous Balochistan that stands resilient in the face of challenges, united in its pursuit of progress and development.

JIT is no answer

By Shahab Usto:

THE federal government has formed a joint investigation team comprising officers of various investigation and intelligence agencies to "ascertain the facts behind a malicious social media campaign against the Supreme Court judges".

Three critical questions must be raised, can the JIT objectively ascertain the 'facts', given a highly divisive and toxic social media? Aren't the facts leading to the unfortunate targeting of judges already known to the government, in view of some recent decisions, which are perceived as controversial, emanating from the court?

And would the JIT's findings, followed by a set of coercive measures against the transgressors, really save the judges from future attacks while court decisions regarded as controversial as well as internal divisions continue?

To answer these questions, we must understand the role and nature of our public service, particularly the judiciary, and its impact on public behaviour.

Across democracies, the actions of public servants, including judges, come under public scrutiny.

In fact, accountability is embedded in employment laws both at the institutional and public levels. At the institutional level, it sets the rules for evaluating the performance of public functionaries. The latter operates on agency principal, meaning that public servants are supposed to act as agents of the people who employ them and pay for their services.

Therefore, it is in the interest of their principal, ie, the people. The judiciary forms a separate and specialised branch of public service in a democracy, but essentially, the judges' job is no different from other public functionaries. They must also render justice to and for the people, and thereby keep the state and government within the confines of the law and Constitution.

Likewise, judges are also liable to public censure if they fail to be deemed to do so ethically. No wonder, the law protecting judges has lost much of its significance in the democracies. Only the obstruction of process or disobedience of judicial orders draws state sanctions.

But law protection rarely causes the judges to be deemed to do so ethically by the people. Competent and upright judges are universally venerated by the people, individually and collectively, against the excesses of their fellow citizens and state authorities.

They face criticism only for ill conduct or skewed judgements. Recently, two US supreme court judges, Thomas Clarence and Samuel Alito, came under scathing criticism; the former for receiving expensive gifts, and the latter for accepting free trips. But the public backlash did not go in vain. It

led to the codification of "rules and principles that guide the conduct of members of the court".

Similarly, Republican-appointed conservative judges are receiving flak for "rewriting" settled laws on such socially and politically explosive issues as abortion, LGBT, guns, and voting rights.

We've also had our share of ethical and jurisprudential problems. Recently, we saw a Supreme Court judge bowing out after corruption charges were pressed against him. Another judge resigned in mysterious circumstances, triggering speculations about his personal dossier. However, contrary to our traditions, our judges tend to be more sensitive about their image than the autocrats in Western democracies. Only the obstruction of process or disobedience of judicial orders draws state sanctions.

But this colonial model of ensuring deference for judges is becoming increasingly ineffective, notwithstanding the plethora of penal laws and liberal use of the state machinery to gag the press and silence the people are unhappy with the judges' perceived "camp" and "political" proclivities. And social media has provided them with a vast outlet to express their frustration in a more effective and organised manner.

Therefore, it would be prudent of the authorities, and judges, to expect the people — millions of them — to change their behaviour towards courts that are widely perceived to have

failed to protect fundamental rights. What is needed, instead, is a behavioural and normative change in the judiciary in view of the common folk being long denied their aspirations to security, liberty and honour as promised to them by the founding fathers and reiterated by every judge taking his or her oath.

Traditionally, politicians have been accused of passing legislation inconsistent with the Constitution. But a cursory look at the judicial annals shows the courts also engaged in a jurisprudential back-and-forth, playing dice with the law. Recent judgements appear to boost this observation. The court under the new CPC has engaged in a series of judgments that have even "penitentiary" adjudications. It upheld the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act and thereby curatively provided for an appeal against judgements passed in its original jurisdiction.

Taking a corrective view, it removed the five-year ban imposed on politicians under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution.

The court was also expected, in an act of atonement, to cleanse both its conscience and the stain of unjust conviction and hanging of a former prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

But then, the happy streak suddenly saw a reversal. A three-member bench headed by the chief justice upheld the ECP's petition denying the PTI its party symbol.

throwing it out of the electoral arena. The ECP decision may be technically "correct", but it raises questions of propriety, construction (or interpretation of the law), and precedent.

Should the CJ have sat in a matter involving PTI and its founder who had previously brought action against the current CJ, expelling his office, attempting to tarnish his image, and putting him and his family in a great distress?

Moreover, if the construction provided more than one determination (as it apparently did in ECP's case) shouldn't the court have adopted the one that alleviates from the principal party — arguably the most popular political party — to participate in elections, even if it means playing field for all contenders?

And finally, why did the court have to deviate from the principal party in a precedent, including the 'Benazir Bhutto' case? Ironically, history has answered such questions before, though in a varied and tragic form: ie, military rule, rigged elections, a polarised judiciary, 'controlled' democracy, the persecution of politicians, etc. But lessons have been learnt.

A JIT or a crackdown on social media is no answer to judicial aberrance. Public behaviour towards the judiciary cannot be regulated, except through jurisprudential correctness and interpretational consistency. History records such coercion as witch-hunting to influence the outcome of the elections.

Comparing economic performances

By Khurram Husain:

PEOPLE often ask which political party has the best track record of managing the economy and producing the best results. It is a tricky question to give a straightforward answer to, but if pressed, the most obvious reply would be "none of the above".

The reason is that all major parties have had their stint in power and yet Pakistan continues to be the most reliable client of the IMF, the institution that is the emergency room for economies in distress.

But if one is willing to be patient, there is a more worthwhile answer. First of all, beware of the many fancy words that are used to tout a handful of indicators as measures of economic performance.

The way many fans try to tell you that the GDP growth rate was higher in their time compared to others, or that exports hit a higher peak, or revenue collection grew the fastest, or that inflation was lower during their tenure, or large-scale manufacturing output grew faster than the rest of the economy or any other such indicator. There are good reasons to be wary of a particular indicator presented in this manner. First, indicators such as these do not capture the areas of the economy at a useful way. They only provide snapshots of what is happening in areas of the economy at one point in time.

The real story always lies in how these indicators are connected to each other, and how they evolve over a period of time. It is as if somebody gave you a handful of indicators, such as good blood pressure, a healthy appetite as signs of good health. What you don't know, and the way many fans will not tell you, is whether a serious problem is growing inside the body.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, one problem in measuring economic performance is that the results of actions taken today can take a few years to materialise. The best economic stewardship is

the kind that produces results over the long term, meaning years after the fact. Indicators mentioned here is no longer in power. This is one reason why the steps needed to wean a country off the IMF dependence on the IMF are not taken by any party. They will not be around to claim the credit. The worst stewardship the economy can do is to keep the kind that produces short-term positive results but meddles to long-term harm.

For example, building projects that are not economically or financially feasible, and do not add to the economy's productive capacity, but cost a lot of money, make economies just long enough for their term to end and power to pass to the next government.

These projects can produce a short-lived spurt in growth that can potentially produce a bump in GDP growth, and give us impressive-looking statistics like lavish roads or highways. But they do not help the economy's underlying weaknesses, while adding to its debt service bill.

Another example is printing money. If a government resorts to printing money to pay its expenses, it will give a short-lived boost to the economy, but after 18 to 24 months, it will either produce very high inflation or a demand for dollars that the foreign exchange reserves are not able to service, leading eventually to a large exchange rate devaluations.

What happens very often in Pakistan is that the government promotes economic growth using tools like borrowing and printing of money, and points to the resultant growth spurt as evidence of its superior management. But when the inevitable problems appear, they blame the government for not doing enough for their term to end and power to pass to the next government.

Then they went ahead and blamed the PM for creating the mess and a 'killing' of the growth they had generated. It happened one more time when the PTI government was ousted in a vote of no-confidence in April 2022, leaving behind an inflation bomb and a balance-of-payments crisis for the incoming PDM government to manage, and then blaming them for it.

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Building trust

By Jamil Ahmad:

THERE is no doubt that climate change is one of humanity's most complex challenges and needs to be urgently tackled. But is the world falling in forging a cohesive response? The date of Rama's rebirth on Jan 22, 2024 was the hottest recorded, with the annual average global temperature climbing 1.45 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports indicate that world temperatures could tip over the 1.5°C threshold by 2030. Projections released this month under the World Bank, by 2050, climate change would have internally displaced 216 million people, mostly in Africa and Asia.

A fresh account of how climate change-related risks continue to rise each year is furnished by the World Economic Forum's risk report for 2024, released this month under the WEF theme "Building Trust". This year, like last, the first four global risks in terms of severity are related to climate change. These are extreme weather events, critical changes to Earth's systems, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, and natural resource shortage, in that order, as well as pollution, which ranks 10 on the list of 34 global risks. The report warns that connections between climate change

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risks and other risks "may collectively evolve into a 'polycrisis' centred around natural resource shortages by 2030".

The report found that the impact of climate change could result in the loss of \$2.5 trillion to the world economy and lead to an additional 14.5m deaths by 2050, mostly due to extreme weather events, including floods, heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, and tropical storms.

Floods, "the highest acute risk of climate-induced mortality", are estimated to claim 5.2 million lives by 2050. Droughts, the second leading cause of climate-related mortality, are estimated to cause another 3.2m deaths. In terms of economic losses, heatwaves top the list with an estimated loss of \$7tr to the world economy by 2050. Being the most vulnerable and least prepared, South Asia and Africa will bear the brunt of these human and economic losses. In countries most vulnerable to climate change, floods, intense heatwaves, prolonged dry spells,

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A saffron rebirth

By F.S. Aijazuddin:

MODERN India's founding father M.K. Gandhi was shot on Jan 30, 1948, by Nathuram Godse, a member of the Rashtriya Swamansavak Sangh (RSS). Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's security detail was hit by a bullet in Rama at Aayodhya, built at a cost of Indian rupees 1,800 crore (\$17 million).

No one knows for sure where or when Rama was born. A site has been contested for at least 500 years, since the first Mughal emperor Babar's order for a mosque to be built there. The date of Rama's rebirth on Jan 22, 2024 — not as his legendary successor Lord Krishna but as a modern political BJP politician — will never be forgotten. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ensured that a founder member of the BJP, who was the first Ram Rath Yatra that began from Somnath (Gujarat) on Sept 25, 1990. It aimed at a pious height of Aayodhya a month later. Advani used this yatra to sensitize his fellow Hindus in the Ram Janmabhumi issue, raising it from the mundane level of a local property dispute at the pious height of an emotive national crusade. Once deputy prime minister, he lost his claim to the top job after he made a complimentary but ill-timed reference to the Quaid-i-Azam in his book "My shared birthplace".

Hidden amongst them was L.K. Advani ever proud of his RSS affiliation and a founder member of the BJP, who was the first Ram Rath Yatra that began from Somnath (Gujarat) on Sept 25, 1990. It aimed at a pious height of Aayodhya a month later. Advani used this yatra to sensitize his fellow Hindus in the Ram Janmabhumi issue, raising it from the mundane level of a local property dispute at the pious height of an emotive national crusade. Once deputy prime minister, he lost his claim to the top job after he made a complimentary but ill-timed reference to the Quaid-i-Azam in his book "My shared birthplace".

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Prominent absentees from the Ayodhya festivities were Congress leaders still attached to the umbilical cord of secular India. In an affronted non-invites lurking beyond the pale of Modi's hospitality, and notably, the four shankaracharyas representing the cardinal points of Pur (east), Karnataka (west), and Uttarakhand (north).

The presence of any of the four shankaracharyas (although not mandatory) would have been an act of religious sanctity to the solemn pran pratishtha. India's shankaracharyas have shown a singular

Hindu face. The absence of all four, though, attracted the wrong sort of attention. It was as if (the analogy is not an exact fit) Chaudhry's coronation ceremony had been held in the absence of the bishops of Bath and Wells, or Durham, Hereford and Norwich.

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promise made through his numerous elections. A few suspect that one of the shankaracharyas was peeved that promoter of the Ram Rath Yatra was the Rama mandir made to him by the Congress party when in power had been the shankaracharyas of the present BJP government.

All or none may be true. The money that shrines in every faith has always been a lucrative business. The Roman Catholic Church's enrichment on individual contributions — Peter's Pence — collected in churches would have been a billion shrines are often used to disputes among stick-fingered trustees.

Although the temple at Aayodhya is the most expensive religious project built to date in India (funded by private donations), it will take decades if not centuries to complete. The accumulated wealth of India's richest temple, the Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram. Said to have assets worth the equivalent of 120,000 crore, managed by a trust headed by the Travancore royal family, it has its eight underground vaults a treasure trove of "gold idols, gold, emeralds, antique wood, diamonds and rubies". The inventory ordered in 2011 by India's supreme court has yet to be completed.

The Ayodhya mandir project has cemented Modi's reputation this summer. What will he do for an encore? Conceivably, he will order the construction of a fresh temple to mark the birthplace of Rama's avatar Lord Krishna at Mathura. Ayodhya has cleared the way for him. All Modi needs is evidence of a previous growth that respectively parties bragged about as their achievement, also produced the ensuing crisis.

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Pakistan blessed with sizeable youth population but of no use: Aslam Khan

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairman Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW), Brig. (ret'd) Aslam Khan has said that the nation has blessed Pakistan with a sizeable population of youth which can benefit country's economy enormously. But it was our misfortune that our young population was not availing the opportunities, otherwise Pakistan's economic situation would have been different, he added.

In a statement issued here on Thursday, he said that it was imperative to take prompt action to take advantage of this prospect since its loss could have far-reaching consequences.

Aslam Khan said

that 240 million people were living in Pakistan, and the country's population was expanding steadily at a pace of 2 per cent. In contrast, the population growth in the South Asian region was 1.2 per cent.

Based on estimates, 38% of Pakistan's population is under 15 years old, while 4% is 65 years of age or more. This results in a youth bulge since 58 per cent of those in the working age group are between the ages of 15 and 64.

Despite this gift, the population is not benefiting, which is even more concerning as the unemployment rate is very high which is resulting in social problems, he observed. The chairman PEW's noted that

numerous nations have successfully capitalised on the demographic dividend by augmenting their labour pool, improving savings rates, and building up a workforce that is well-educated and proficient.

With 159.83 million people anticipated to be in the working age group Pakistan's population age structure makes it fundamentally a young nation. Now one might wonder why Pakistan's situation did not benefit from the youth bulge.

He said that what is even more concerning is the realisation that a sizeable segment of our populace is still untrained and jobless, which may put them at

higher risk of developing melancholy or engaging in criminal activity.

Therefore, it should not be shocking that a great number of people attempt to cross borders illegally, sometimes even at great personal risk.

On the other hand, the youth bulge element alone is a prescription for disaster since the unemployed, illiterate, and ignorant population poses a greater threat to the nation.

Decades have passed since we have failed to take advantage of this window of opportunity but it is never too late.

Nevertheless, by investing in our youth, we can lessen this situation's risk.



ISLAMABAD: Secretary Interior, Chief Commissioner and IG in a meeting with Federal Minister for Interior Dr. Gohar Ejaz.

Old politicians are playing their last innings, says Bilawal

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former foreign minister and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that the old politicians are playing their last innings, this time the contest will be between the 'arrow' and 'lion'.

In an exclusive interview with Rohn TV program Newsnight, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that he wants to start

a hunger eradication programme, and a Kisan Card scheme for the farmers of South Punjab.

He said that the Kisan Card would be very popular among the rural population and would help them improve their living standards. He also said that he would give benefits to the backward classes and uplift them from poverty if his party comes to power.

Bilawal lamented

that whatever government comes, only the elite get benefits and common people are ignored. He said there is a historic economic crisis in the country and the government has failed to address it.

On political victimization, the PPP chairman said that they had warned the founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to not put sisters and daughters of the rivals in jail.

He said that

former president Asif Ali Zardari preferred service over revenge and did not take any action against those who wronged him.

He also said that the old politicians are playing their last innings and they have no future in politics. He said that this time the contest would be between 'arrow' and 'lion', referring to the symbols of his party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

Chaudhry Salik opens up on family differences with Parvez Elahi

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chaudhry Salik Hussain, son of Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain on Thursday opened up on family differences with Parvez Elahi.

In an interview with private TV news channel Chaudhry Salik Hussain said differences emerged with Parvez Elahi's family, after an attempt was made to

remove Shujaat Sahab as PML-Q chief.

The former minister said he has no interest in competing with his aunt Qaisra Parvez Elahi, but they have chosen separate paths.

Replying to a question related to his aunt, the PML-Q leader said his father did not say the PTI president could come out of jail after leaving the party.

"Emotionally, it becomes challenging when a personality confronts you in place of your mother," Salik Hussain said.

He went on to say that Parvez Elahi is paying the price of saving someone else's life.

Moving further, Salik Hussain said Moonis Elahi has a 50-acre farmhouse in Gujarat, but instead of living there, he came here to live with us.

"This is our shared home, and he came here to 'disturb' Chaudhry Shafay Hussain."



QUETTA: Workers busy in preparing political party poster on his workplace for upcoming General Election.



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of elected members of Gilgit-Baltistan Council called on President Dr. Arif Alvi at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

CPEC emerges as a symbol of exemplary friendship: Chinese Consul General

LAHORE (INP): The Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Lahore Mr. Zhao Shiren has said that China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the glowing example and hallmark of deepening China-Pakistan friendship and partnership.

He expressed these views while talking to journalists in Meet the Press Program of Lahore Press Club on Thursday.

While addressing the media, Consul General Mr. Zhao Shiren further said that

CPEC is the joint venture of China and Pakistan which has completed 10 years and will be completed in any case. Under CPEC, 26 billion dollars have been invested so far, while construction is still going on. About electric

transmission line, he said it is being upgraded. We want to bring prosperity to our old friend Pakistan.

Pakistan is an agricultural country and Punjab government has formulated a ten year plan regarding agricultural development. The Consulate General stands ready to work with the Punjab to enhance agricultural cooperation.

He said that China, Pakistan and Iran are three friendly countries and together they will move jointly ahead in the region.

There should not be any conflict between Pakistan and Iran, the situation will return to the previous position soon. Friendship between brothers and friends is invested so far, while construction is still going on. About electric

for the excellent coverage of Pak-China friendship and CPEC. He said China will further strengthen the mutual relations with the journalist community. The Chinese Consul General said that Pakistan and India have disputes over Kashmir, which is related to sovereignty and territorial integrity. He calls for both sides to resolve this issue in accordance with the UN Charter and the relevant UNSC resolutions.

He said that ML-1 is a big project, and it was proposed by Pakistan, which we are ready to build and the people of Pakistan will be hopefully get good news soon. In this regard, the Chinese railway engineering delegation has also visited Pakistan last month.

About the ML-1 project, he said it will be completed in two phases, first from Peshawar to Lahore and then from Lahore to Karachi.

Various suggestions were given to the Chinese Consul General by the Lahore Press Club, on which he said that he would take every possible measures in this regard. The distinguished guest also agreed to consider to start Chinese language course for the members of the club and further agreed to coordinate to get scholarships in China for the professional training of the members.

At the end, the club office-bearers presented flowers to the consul general. The CG wrote his comments in the visitor book.

Artist entrepreneur fund of Rs.1 bln being established for artists: DG PAC

RAWALPINDI (INP): Director General of Punjab Arts Council, Syed Bilal Haider has said that an artist entrepreneur fund of Rs.1 billion was being established for the welfare of artists, out of which interest-free loans of up to Rs.25 lakh will be given to artists, artisans and fine arts graduates.

He stated this while chaired a meeting of the Board of Management (BoM) held after the painting exhibition organized in Punjab Arts Council in collaboration with VSCOOP on Thursday.

More than 70 works of art of the students of twin cities were displayed in a painting exhibition. Director General of Punjab Arts Council, Syed Bilal Haider who was the chief guest at the opening ceremony of the exhibition also distributed certificates of appreciation to all the students who participated in the exhibition.

Syed Bilal Haider informed the members of the Board of Management about the aims and objectives. He told the board members that Punjab Arts Council was organizing a national level drama festival, in which teams from all four provinces of Pakistan will participate. Provincial level singing and painting competitions will be held in February and March. New arts councils will be implemented

in every district of Punjab province. Arts classes have been launched across the province to promote the arts, he added.

The meeting was attended by Asma Butt, Bahar Nazki, Aslam Mughal, Mohtamud Azim Iqbal, Director Waqar Ahmed, Deputy Director Mohtamud Shakur, Assistant Director Mohtamud Suleman, Internal Auditor Saqlain Mehmood and Saqlain Mehmood.



HYDERABAD: Officials of Inland Revenue burn large quantity of Cigarettes during the destruction ceremony of non custom paid items in Hyderabad.

Pakistan Commercial Center launched at ICT Belt and Road Union

SHANGHAI (INP): Zheng Chuanjun, Deputy Secretary General of the ICT Belt and Road Union, and Ms. Ayesha Khan, representative of Lasiro Limited, signed an agreement to launch the Pakistan Commercial Center at the ICT Belt and Road Union, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Thursday.

This is part of the efforts promoting high-quality economic and trade cooperation between China and

Pakistan and on a wider scale.

The launch of the center was witnessed by government officials, business leaders and more than 500 global entrepreneurs in the fields of digital economy and industrial investment at the 2024 Future Opportunity Investment Conference. The Pakistan Commercial Center will serve as a one-stop shop for Pakistani businesses looking to expand their reach in China by providing

membership services for Pakistani enterprises in China or preparing to enter China. This includes market research, legal advice and other essential services to support businesses in their international endeavors.

The Center will provide a platform for exporters, importers and investors to connect, negotiate deals and explore opportunities with the Belt and Road partners.

The ICT Belt and Road Union is a part-

nership between China and other Belt and Road countries, aimed at promoting trade, investment, and cultural exchanges.

The center is expected to act as a catalyst for increased trade between Pakistan and other Belt and Road countries.

It will also enable Pakistani businesses to access new markets, improve their competitiveness and contribute to the country's economic development, the report added.

IHC extends its stay on Iddat Nikah case proceedings till January 31

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court on Thursday extended its stay order barring the trial court from conducting proceedings on the illegal Nikah case against former premier and PTI founder Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi till January 31.

IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq heard the petitions filed by Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi seeking dismissal of the Nikah in Iddat case against them.

The counsel for the PTI founder and Bushra Bibi, Salman Akram Raja, did not appear in the court today. His assistant lawyer requested the court to adjourn the hearing till next week.

However, Bushra's ex-husband Khawar Maneka's

lawyer Raja Rizwan Abbasi pleaded with the high court to vacate its stay order on the trial court's proceedings. He said that since the petitioners got such relief from the court, their lawyer won't come to the court.

The chief justice corrected the lawyer remarking 'don't say that. Three lawyers from the petitioners are already in the court'.

Saying this, the court adjourned the hearing till January 31.

On January 16, a Rawalpindi trial court indicted former prime minister Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi in the Iddat case.

The charges against the couple were framed by senior civil judge Qudratullah on a complaint filed by Bushra

Bibi's ex-husband Khawar Farid Maneka under Sections 34 (common intention), 496 (marriage ceremony fraudulently gone through without lawful marriage) and 496B (fornication) of the Pakistan Penal Code.

Last week Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi filed a petition in the IHC seeking dismissal of the case against them.

During its previous hearing on January 19, the Islamabad High Court stopped the trial court from recording the statements of the witnesses in the Nikah in Iddat case. The chief justice remarked during the hearing that "according to the law, if a marriage takes place during Iddat, it would be regularized later, if the marriage is not regular, then what is the crime in it?"



LAHORE: PML-N central leader Nasir Butt pose for group photo with Mian Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif after meeting regarding National Elections at Model Town secretariat on Thursday.

Pakistan emerges as premier choice for lucrative US investments'

KARACHI (INP): In a groundbreaking virtual meeting with the President of the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce USA (PCC-USA) Amir Piprani and Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, Masood Khan declared Pakistan as the top destination for profitable investments by U.S. entrepreneurs. Ambassador Khan emphasized that the recently established Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is dedicated to providing a seamless, one-window solution for investors, ensuring they capitalize on the vast opportunities offered by Pakistan's expansive market.

During the meeting, also attended by Pak Consul General in Houston Aftab Ahmed Chaudhry and Trade & Invest-

ment Attaché Shaista Bunyad, Ambassador Khan reiterated the commitment of SIFC to facilitate foreign investors, particularly the Pak-American business community eager to invest in their homeland.

Highlighting the significance of SIFC, Masood Khan stated, "We have established the Special Investment Facilitation Council to guarantee that foreign investors, especially the Pak-American business community, receive the necessary support in pursuing their business ventures in Pakistan."

Amir Piprani took the opportunity to update the Ambassador on the upcoming Pakistan Business Expo 2024, scheduled to take place in October in Houston. The expo

aims to showcase a diverse range of Pakistani products spanning sectors such as sports and surgical equipment, information technology, beauty and health products, food and beverages, oil and gas, home living, and textiles and jewelry.

Expressing optimism about the event, Piprani shared, "Pakistan Business Expo 2024 will serve as a platform to exhibit various Pakistani products, fostering trade ties and enhancing business collaborations between the two nations."

In response, Ambassador Masood Khan assured the PCC-USA of the Embassy's and Pak Consulate in Houston's unwavering support in organizing the event, pledging every possible facilitation to ensure its success.

Petrol, diesel prices in Pakistan may increase from February 1

ISLAMABAD (INP): In the lead-up to the general elections scheduled for February 8, Pakistan is bracing itself for a potential surge in petrol and diesel prices.

Sources privy to the development said the Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar-led caretaker government after a series of consecutive reductions in petroleum prices, is considering a substantial increase of Rs 7 per liter, reported a section of the press.

Should the decision materialise, it would mark the first uptick in petrol and diesel prices since November 1,

2023. Experts closely monitoring petroleum markets suggested that this time, the circumstances are unique, attributing the possible price hike to recent geopolitical events.

The attacks on ships in the Red Sea by Houthi rebels in the Middle East have led to a notable increase in global oil prices.

In the past week alone, the international market has witnessed a surge in the price of petrol, climbing from \$83 to \$89 per barrel. Simultaneously, high-speed diesel prices have seen an increase from \$93 to \$97 per barrel.

The overall crude oil price has experienced an uptick from \$76 to \$80 per barrel. The unrest in the Middle East has significantly contributed to the surge, affecting oil prices worldwide.

Despite the global surge in oil prices, experts anticipate a relatively moderate impact on petrol and diesel prices in Pakistan. The stabilization of the Pakistani rupee against the US dollar is cited as a mitigating factor. Analysts suggest that without this stabilizing influence, the increase in petroleum product prices could have been more pronounced.



ISLAMABAD: Head of Al-Jomah Group along with a delegation called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

Norway desires to further enhance business ties with Pakistan: Envoy

ISLAMABAD (INP): Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan, Per Albert Isaas has said that his country desires to further expand the business relations with Pakistan as both countries have the potential to increase bilateral trade and do more business together.

The ambassador stated this while talking to a delegation of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) led by its President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari which visited his residence in Islamabad on Thursday on luncheon invitation.

During the meeting, the Norwegian Ambassador and the members of CCI delegation discussed matters to further enhance cooperation between the two countries in the fields of business and investment.

Envoy Per Albert Isaas said that supporting the business communities of both countries to engage in trade and economic relations is a key priority of his Embassy. He said that a Norwegian enter-

prise has already signed an agreement to invest in solar and hydropower generation in Pakistan. He said that Norway wants to further strengthen cooperation with Pakistan in many areas including investment, shipping, climate change, renewable energy, and higher education. He assured that his Embassy would cooperate with the business community in taking bilateral business relations to higher levels.

Speaking on the occasion, Secretary General UBG Pakistan, Zafar Bakhtawari said that Pakistan and Norway are enjoying cordial relations that should be transformed into thriving trade and economic relations. He said that the current level of bilateral trade is quite nominal given the actual potential of both countries. He said that Pakistan is facing energy problems and Norway should make more investments in Pakistan's renewable and hydropower sectors to generate cheap energy. He said that the Embassy should cooperate in enhancing business linkages between the

two countries.

Senior Vice President ICCI, Faad Waheed highlighted the potential of cooperation in the blue economy between Pakistan and Norway that should be fully exploited.

Group Leader ICCI, Khalid Iqbal Malik said that Pakistan and Norway have the potential to enhance cooperation in the tourism sector and both should accelerate efforts to realize it.

Former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG Pakistan, Zafar Bakhtawari said that Pakistan and Norway should cooperate in the seafood trade, IT, alternate energy, pharmaceutical sector, and others to strengthen their bilateral economic ties.

Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan former President ICCI, Fiazan Shehzad, Ms. Asma Malik, Ms.

Halina, and others also spoke on the occasion and gave useful suggestions to strengthen bilateral trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Norway.

Khaqan Abbasi expresses concerns over current election process

RAWALPINDI (INP): Former Prime Minister and Muslim League (N) leader, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, expressed disapproval of the current election process, stating that the country cannot function through elections conducted in such a manner. Abbasi raised his concerns during a visit to the anti-corruption office, accompanied by his coordinator. Addressing the media on Thursday, Abbasi questioned the summons issued to the Hafiz Usman, attributing the situation to unclear notices regarding the request for a PML ticket.

He highlighted the trend of individuals being summoned by various entities, such as the police, NAB, and anti-corruption, leading to harassment during the election period. Emphasizing his detachment from the Punjab government, Abbasi drew parallels with past instances during the tenure of the former Chairman of PTI. He stressed the need for a non-contested election process, expressing dissatisfaction with the current treatment of representatives who are not actively contesting elections. Abbasi asserted

that the country cannot run through elections marred by controversy. He urged for transparent and non-controversial elections to ensure the smooth functioning of the constitutional process. Despite his disagreement with the current stance of PML-N, Abbasi clarified that he has been associated with the party for thirty-five years. While acknowledging his lack of contact with Nawaz Sharif since the latter's return, Abbasi affirmed that he has neither applied for nor contested any election against PML-N.



QUETTA: Muhammad Amjad, the Director General of the Punjab Forensic Science Agency, is conducting a briefing at the Balochistan Home Department regarding the Balochistan Forensic Science Laboratory.

ECP initiates inquiry into alleged irregularities in recruitments

LAHORE (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan has initiated an inquiry into alleged irregularities in recruitments and promotions within the Punjab Assembly Secretariat. Over 300 appointments and promotions have come under scrutiny, with particular attention to 35 new recruitments approved during the recent caretaker government period.

Reports indicate that the Election Commission has taken note of promotions violating rules, including the elevation of four deputy superintendents during the caretaker government. Additionally, promotions

of retired employees were uncovered during the investigation.

Sources reveal that within four days, promotions extended to various positions such as assistant secretary, deputy secretary, staff officer to the speaker, English reporters, assistant security officers, telephone operators, assistant garage supervisor, lawn supervisor, and security assistants.

In related news, the Lahore High Court deferred the hearing on the bail application of former Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Perwaiz Elahi. Elahi faces charges in the case of illegal recruitment

in the Punjab Assembly. The adjournment was granted at the request of the government lawyer, with the Prosecutor General summoned to present arguments during the next hearing.

Justice Shahram Sarwar Chaudhry, presiding over the bail application, expressed that 'more respite should be given', leading to the adjournment of the hearing.

Anti-corruption authorities have filed a case against Chaudhry Perwaiz Elahi, and the Lahore High Court is now reviewing his bail application after an earlier rejection by the anti-corruption court.



NASERABAD: A group photo was taken of the Provincial Secretary, Javed Anwar Shahwani, and Commissioner Tariq Qamar Baloch with players on the occasion of the All Sindh Balochistan Football Tournament.