

QUETTA VOICE

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Plight of Women in Balochistan: A Disturbing Surge in Domestic Violence Cases

Syed Ali Shah:

QUETTA: Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province, grapples with the highest maternal mortality rate (MMR) and child mortality rate (CMR) compared to other provinces in the country. Despite recent efforts to improve healthcare services, insufficient access to adequate nutrition and medical care, exacerbated by governance issues and social taboos, continue to pose significant challenges.

Current Situation:

According to the Pakistan Demographic Health Survey of 2017-18, Balochistan witnesses over 785 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, reflecting a stark reality of maternal healthcare in the region. While there has been a slight decrease in the MMR to 186 deaths per 100,000 live births as per the Pakistan Maternal Mortality Survey (PMMS) 2020, critical issues persist.

Challenges:

In rural Balochistan, pregnant women face formidable barriers in accessing medical care due to governance failures and entrenched social and tribal customs. The dearth of qualified gynecologists further exacerbates the situation, forcing many women to seek care in over-crowded private clinics, often located far from their homes.

Additionally, inadequate nutrition contributes significantly to



maternal and child health challenges in the region. Many women suffer from anemia, hypertension, and other complications during pregnancy, further increasing the risk of maternal mortality.

Efforts and Recommendations:

Addressing maternal and child mortality in Balochistan re-

quires a multifaceted approach. Dr. Zahida Kakar, a prominent gynecologist, emphasizes the urgent need for improved health facilities in rural areas. She underscores the importance of tackling anemia and

other nutritional deficiencies among pregnant women to reduce maternal mortality rates effectively. Furthermore, Dr. Noor Baloch, the Chief of Balochistan's Nutrition Directorate, advocates

for prioritizing family planning as a crucial strategy for mitigating maternal and child mortality. He stresses the importance of launching comprehensive awareness campaigns and enhancing healthcare infrastructure to address these pressing issues effectively.

Despite budgetary allocations exceeding Rs. 70 billion for the health sector in Balochistan for the fiscal year 2023-24, government-run hospitals continue to struggle to provide adequate care. Habib Tahir Advocate, Chief of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Balochistan Chapter, urges concerted efforts from political parties and civil society to hold the government accountable for improving healthcare services across the province.

Conclusion:

The high maternal and child mortality rates in Balochistan demand urgent attention and concerted action from all stakeholders.

From addressing governance failures and social taboos to enhancing healthcare infrastructure and promoting nutritional interventions, comprehensive strategies are needed to safeguard the lives of vulnerable women and children in the region. Only through collaborative efforts can Balochistan overcome these daunting challenges and ensure the well-being of its mothers and infants.

Challenges Faced In Polio Campaign Amidst Chaman Protest

Manan Mandokhail:

In Chaman, a border town rife with tension, the fight against polio has encountered significant obstacles, primarily stemming from the prolonged sit-in opposing the introduction of travel documents. This resistance not only hindered the polio campaign but also underscored the broader challenges faced in administering health initiatives in volatile regions.

Leaves Personnel Tasked With Guarding Polio Team Fell Victim To Torture

The leaders of the sit-in openly opposed the polio campaign, exacerbating the already fragile situation. Shockingly, a levy's man tasked with guarding the polio team fell victim to torture by local residents, reflecting the depth of resentment toward the campaign.

Amidst continued border closures and a lack of interest from the administration, the efficacy of the polio campaign in Chaman suffered.

Election preparations, spearheaded by senior administration officials, diverted attention and resources away from the vital task of polio eradication in the



Balochistan province.

ACs And DCs Focused On Elections

Assistant commissioners and deputy commissioners found themselves inundated with myriad responsibilities, including ensuring the security of candidates and maintaining peace during the elections. Unfortunately, this preoccupation overshadowed efforts to prioritize the polio campaign, leaving it at the mercy of competing agendas.

Amidst these challenges, it is crucial to acknowledge the tireless efforts of polio workers, particularly female workers, who braved harsh weather conditions and societal taboos to administer polio drops to children. Their dedication and resilience in the face of adversity deserve commendation.

Sustained Efforts Coupled With Robust Oversight

It is imperative that those in positions of power in Islamabad listen to the voices of local staff who are on the front lines of the battle to make

Balochistan polio-free. Sustained efforts, coupled with robust oversight at the district and provincial levels, are essential to overcoming the complex challenges posed by both militant opposition and administrative neglect.

Police, Levies Sacrificed Their Lives

Tragically, the sacrifices made by police and levies personnel, as well as the hardships endured by female polio workers, underscore the urgent need for concerted action to ensure the success of the polio eradication campaign in regions like Chaman. As the international community works towards eradicating this crippling virus, it must not overlook the unique challenges faced by communities on the front lines of the battle against polio. Only through collective effort and unwavering determination can we hope to achieve a polio-free future for all.

Raging Inferno Engulfs Koh Jandran Kohlu Barkhan

Asif Kareem Khetran:



BARKHAN: In a devastating turn of events, the serene beauty of Koh Jandran, a towering peak nestled between Barkhan and Kohlu, has been marred by a raging inferno. This lush green forest, renowned for its breathtaking vistas, has succumbed to flames that cast a haunting glow visible from afar.

Situated in the enclave of Tikh Jandran, a habitat cherished by the Syed community, this mountain serves as a lifeline for the locals. Their sustenance hinges on the rearing of livestock and the gathering of dry wood, which they trade in Barkhan city.

However, despite the urgent need for intervention, the district administration has yet to mobilize significant measures to combat the relentless blaze.

For hours on end, the fire rages unchecked, ravaging acres of verdant terrain and threatening the livelihoods of countless inhabitants. Urgent action is imperative to quell the flames and safeguard the delicate ecosystem that sustains both flora and fauna alike.

However, finally, the authorities reached the spot after repeated appeals and extinguished the flames of fire.

Funeral prayers held for 2 army officers martyred in North Waziristan

WAZIRISTAN: The funeral prayers of two army officers, who were among seven martyred yesterday in a terrorist attack on a security forces' post in North Waziristan, were offered on Sunday, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

At 6:15am on Saturday, a group of six militants stormed the Frontier Corps' post in the Khaddi market area in North Waziristan's Mir Ali area. The militants rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the gate, followed by multiple blasts, including a suicide bombing, said local officials. Seven soldiers — including Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed, 39, resident of Karachi and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar Shaheed, 23, resident of Talagang — were martyred in the attack. Six terrorists were also neutralised in the subsequent clearance operation.

A group affiliated with Hafiz Gul Bahadur, previously a government contractor and a good Taliban-turned-militant leader, claimed responsibility for the attack. Bahadur's outfit is the strongest militant group in North Waziristan. He was flushed out in Operation Zarb-i-Azb in 2014 and fled to Afghanistan. In the early



hours of Sunday, the funeral prayers of the two officers were offered at Chakikla Garrison Rawalpindi, according to the military's media wing.

President Asif Ali Zardari, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahr Shamsud Mirza and Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir attended the prayers, along with other senior serving military and civil officers, relatives of the martyred officials, and locals of the area. "The Pakistan Army has consistently upheld the ideals of faith, unity and discipline. Guided by these enduring principles, the Pakistan Army has always endeavored to set higher benchmarks of professionalism and loyalty in its unrelenting fight against terrorism," the ISPR statement quoted President Zardari as saying.

Kakar's Comeback: Senate Nomination Papers Submitted

Syed Ali Shah:

QUETTA: Former caretaker Prime Minister, Anwar ul Haq Kakar, made a significant move on Saturday by submitting his nomination papers for the upcoming Senate seat in Balochistan. His papers were formally submitted by Senator Danish Kumar of the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP). This marks Kakar's reentry into the political arena after previously serving as a senator from Balochistan. Kakar had resigned from his senatorial position upon assuming the role of caretaker Prime Minister.

36 Candidates In The Run

The submission of Kakar's nomination papers adds an intriguing dynamic to the political landscape of Balochistan, which is gearing up for the upcoming Senate elections scheduled for April 2nd.

A total of 36 candidates, including prominent figures such as Aimal Wali Khan, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa President of the Awami National Party (ANP), and



Maulana Abdul Wasey of the Jamaat ul Ulamae Islam (JUI), have thrown their hats into the ring for the 11 Senate seats in

Balochistan.

Aimal Wali's Political Refuge

The decision of Aimal Wali Khan to seek political refuge in Balochistan, following in the footsteps of Maulana Fazal ur Rehman, underscores the strategic significance of the province in the political landscape of Pakistan. It reflects a calculated move by political figures to ensure their representation in the upper house of the parliament.

Aimal Wali is also backed by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Similarly, Jan Muhammad Buledi of the National Party is also backed by the PPP. The two parties including the ANP and NP had vied for President Asif Ali Zardari in the recently held presidential elections in the country.

As the Senate elections draw closer, all eyes will be on Balochistan, where the political maneuvers and alliances formed in the run-up to the polls will shape the future trajectory of the province and the country at large.

THE BALUCHISTAN VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Balochistan Needs Action, Not Another Failed Polio Campaign

Editorial: The news of a children in Chaman and Dera Bugti contracting polio, in Balochistan after three years, is a damning indictment of the provincial health department and donor agencies entrusted with this critical public health mission.

Imported Solutions Don't Work For far too long, a top-down approach relying on imported solutions has dominated our fight against polio. We, the people of Balochistan, have the indigenous knowledge and cultural understanding necessary to effectively combat this disease.

Where are the cultural norms that educate our communities in the local languages? Where are the efforts to address vaccine hesitancy through dialogue and trust-building with local leaders?

Donor agencies must also shoulder some of the blame Have they critically evaluated the effectiveness of their funding, or have they simply perpetuated a cycle of dependence on external solutions?

The upcoming vaccination campaign is crucial, but it cannot be a one-off effort. We need a sustained, multi-pronged approach that integrates local knowledge, strengthens healthcare infrastructure, and prioritizes community engagement.

This is a wake-up call. Let Balochistan not be known for this resurgence of a preventable disease. Let's work together, with our own solutions at the forefront, to banish polio for good.

Words vs works

By Jan-e-Alam Khaki:

MUSLIM-majority societies in general, and South Asian Muslim societies in particular, face numerous conflicting issues with regard to everyday life. These admittedly are very complex problems, which do not lend themselves to easy solutions.

We are good even in almsgiving and philanthropy, but in practice, we tend to lack in ethical values, care and concern for the larger society, as required by our faith.

Generally, I think a great many of us do not even think about these issues. Often, people say it is the rulers (only) who are corrupt, completely ignoring the fact that we — as common people — waste no time in making unethical choices.

In Islamic ethics, hypocrisy is condemned in strong words. Moreover, I wonder where our leaders come from, do they fall from some other world, or do they rise from amongst us? Blaming our politicians, or bureaucracy, does not absolve us from what we treat our society.

Rich or poor, low or high, illiterate or educated, all seem to contribute to this mess. A beggar who does not need to beg but still does so is a corrupt human; a wealthy person feeding the cycle of corruption is corruptly a blogger who disseminates fake news is a corrupter of the public through fares, markets, shopping plazas. The most agonising indiscipline is seen on

By Muhammad Amir Rana

The new government has been sworn in and, as expected, has made the revival of the economy its top priority. Everything is set for the continuity of policies formulated during the PDM.

Everything is set for the continuity of policies formulated during the PDM. The existing security framework has been built on the 'doctrine of strength', and there is little likelihood of a change in direction. This means that the authorities here will continue to put pressure on the Afghan Taliban to crack down on the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan and other militant groups operating from Afghan soil.

It is likely that Pakistan will maintain some distance from the Taliban regime. This is partly due to pressure from its allies and lenders, who disapprove of the Taliban's actions, and partly because, as those Pakistan had with the Taliban in the 1990s, however, China's public security sector is essential to the stability of the regime.

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Why do they hate Trump? The 'deep state' — which stalwart liberals once called the military-industrial complex — cannot trust Trump to be in charge of fighting wars, not that Trump has shown the slightest inclination towards such a project.

Why do they hate Trump?

By Anis Shivani:

It has become rank heresy in liberal circles to define Donald Trump as anything but the second coming of Hitler, or at least Mussolini. Fascist or ethno-nationalist motives are evoked to explain Trump's appeal to the white working class. Yet, during Trump's first presidency, no new major wars were started, a first for any administration since the onset of the national security state 80 years ago.

On the cusp of the 2020 election, I feared the restart of the forever wars under a newly empowered neoliberal regime, which is exactly what has happened. Russia was provoked into starting a war which rarely a test case for our old alliances for the end game of empire, which is to speak a China across a range of events spanning the next decade.

Trump was not a fascist when in power. He refused to exercise dictatorial powers. He did offer his America First movement to essentially the same as what used to be called isolationism during

Maintaining security

State-Khorasan and the Taliban's support for Baloch insurgents all threaten Chinese interests in Pakistan. Beijing will caution Pakistan against distancing itself too much from the Taliban, as re-engagement could reconvene difficult at a later stage.

Handling security-related affairs in Pakistan would likely be considered a slippery slope. Pakistan would like to continue to maintain its existing relationship with India, avoiding any escalation. Pakistan prioritises peaceful relations with Iran. However, the Iranians will respond decisively to any perceived violation of their core interests.

Pakistan seeks investment from the Gulf countries and China and will fully address the security concerns of these partners. Pakistan has already established a comprehensive mechanism instituted by the PPP government in 2009 and continued under the PML-N and PTI governments.

The security needs of the Gulf countries and China, and these countries would need a robust private and public security sector to meet the concerns of Gulf investors. This focus goes beyond traditional military defence and emphasises the role of law-enforcement agencies such as police and the counterterrorism departments. The federal

governments may play a nominal role in evolving mechanisms, except by providing support through regulatory and legislative if required. The most pressing challenge will likely come from Balochistan where the insurgency is changing tactics, complicating both military and political engagement for the state. In his maiden speech after taking oath, Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti indicated that his government would also attempt a negotiation strategy with the insurgents. This statement directly contradicts his previous philosophy of brutally crushing terrorism. No one will stop the National Counter Terrorism Authority from drafting a few more versions of the National Internal Security Policy and other policies to counter violent extremism, which the federal cabinet will happily approve. After all, such policy drafts help develop another programme, similar to the Balochistan package initiated by the PPP government in 2009 and continued under the PML-N and PTI governments.

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of its own responsibilities. Its top priority will be addressing political agitation with a zero-tolerance approach. This would mean preventing religious-political parties and the PTI from launching protest movements in the streets of the federal and provincial capitals.

For the security establishment, a political turmoil's damage and investor confidence more than terrorism in the peripheries. The National Accountability Bureau and the Federal Investigation Agency will fully support the government in dealing with the opposition and maintaining order in the country. No one will stop the National Counter Terrorism Authority from drafting a few more versions of the National Internal Security Policy and other policies to counter violent extremism, which the federal cabinet will happily approve. After all, such policy drafts help develop another programme, similar to the Balochistan package initiated by the PPP government in 2009 and continued under the PML-N and PTI governments.

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Punjabi in schools

By Faisal Bari:

THE chief minister of Punjab, Ms Maryam Nawaz, has said that Punjabi will be taught across schools in the province. This was announced at the Punjab Culture Day ceremony last week.

It is a welcome announcement. Some 80 million people speak Punjabi in Pakistan. Once worldwide, Punjabi speakers number around 110m. Why should the language of so many not be taught in schools? If 80m or so speak the language and are able to express what they need to in Punjabi, why would there be an issue with using Punjabi in schools, and why not make it a medium of instruction for children whose mother tongue is Punjabi, the language spoken at home?

There is strong evidence that early education should be in the language that he or she brings to school. This facilitates the child's mental development, and it makes learning easier and better as well. If children speak Punjabi at home, this should be the medium of instruction in the early years. Once the child has learnt the basics of Urdu, the medium can be shifted to other languages. This facilitates the use of these languages. We do not need a lot of written material, as early learning depends (and should depend) far more on auditory learning than on reading and writing. And, if some 80m speakers of the language are in Punjab, it does complicate matters a bit more.

number of children who speak a particular language in a particular area, it makes sense to use that language in early education. This allows the children to become interested in learning. Teaching in Punjabi in the early years makes sense for large areas in the province.

It is sometimes argued that many of the smaller languages should boast a lot of books or other written material. But this is not a substantial argument. The use of these languages. We do not need a lot of written material, as early learning depends (and should depend) far more on auditory learning than on reading and writing.

And, if some 80m speakers of the language are in Punjab, it does complicate matters a bit more. We already have too many subjects and learning objectives for each subject. Our students are already overburdened as it is.

They learn/teach English, Urdu, social studies, mathematics, Islamiat and Quran naza. And there is a lot within each subject as well. Regarding curricula in South Asia, many experts have commented that we overburden our students with teachers and make the latter race to complete the curricula rather than focus on what students should be learning. Should another subject be added without taking school hours away from other subjects? We will lose students gain from this or feel more encumbered?

Students are already learning at least two languages (Urdu and English) even in the early years. Do we want to add another language as a subject? In some places, students are taught the essentials of Urdu as well. Being confident with Urdu is important when cutting

back. Do we have teachers to teach Punjabi as a subject? Do keep in mind that Punjabi as the medium of instruction in the early years is very different from teaching Punjabi as a subject. And, if we are being crisscrossed, as are business procedures that are part of the course for organisations, it is as if the discrediting of the Russagate hoax never happened, and neither did the failed multiple impeachment drives.

school and the quality of the child in most schools is poor, should we focus our energies on introducing Urdu as a subject or on other priorities? From an education perspective, the answer is clear. But from a political and linguistic perspective, the answer might be different.

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's larger point about the need to revive Punjabi, to restore it to the status that it had in the past, is a good one. We need to preserve Punjabi cultures as well. But for this to happen, it is not enough to have a subject in Punjabi as a subject that is going to be important, using Punjabi (and other languages) as a medium of instruction in the early years of education might be more important. Punjabi needs to become the medium

of communication and instruction in most schools. Once the use of Punjabi becomes 'normalised' and the real and perceived stigma against using Punjabi is weakened, a revival can take place. The use of Punjabi as a medium of instruction makes sense from this perspective as well. Maryam Nawaz's larger point about the need to revive Punjabi, to restore it to the status that it had in the past, is a good one. We need to preserve Punjabi cultures as well. But for this to happen, it is not enough to have a subject in Punjabi as a subject that is going to be important, using Punjabi (and other languages) as a medium of instruction in the early years of education might be more important. Punjabi needs to become the medium

UN passes Pakistan's resolution calling for combating Islamophobia

UNITED NATIONS (INP): A resolution presented by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations to combat Islamophobia has been successfully passed by the world peace body, signalling a collective effort to address the growing concerns surrounding the issue on a global scale.

The resolution, spearheaded by Pakistan, garnered widespread support from member states, underscoring the urgency and importance of combating discrimination and violence against Muslims worldwide. The resolution specifically calls for action to end the ongoing violence targeting Muslims in the context of Islamophobia.

A key aspect of the resolution is the request for the UN secretary-general to appoint a special envoy tasked with coordinating concerted efforts to counter Islamophobia. However, it is noteworthy that 44 countries, including India, chose not to participate in the voting process.

This decision raises questions about the stance of these nations on combating Islamophobia and their commitment to promoting religious tolerance and inclusivity on the global stage. Meanwhile, on the International Day to

Combat Islamophobia, UN chief Antonio Guterres appealed to maintain peace and order in Ramadan in his address to the General Assembly. Antonio Guterres said sectarian rhetoric is defaming communities. "We must unite to fight intolerance and bigotry," he stated.

He further said that social media platforms were fuelling hate speech, calling for an end to harassment based on religion. "We cannot continue to fight hate and bigotry. Today's terrorist incident in New Zealand shows that we must all stand together and root out anti-Muslim bigotry," Guterres stressed.



ISLAMABAD: Leader of Pakistan Muslim League (N) Khawaja Saad Rafique calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

APHC-AJK leaders condemn ban on Hurriyat parties in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (INP): The All Parties Hurriyat Front (APHC-AJK) chapter has condemned frequent use of oppressive measures and illegal ban on political parties by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Hindutva Indian government to suppress Kashmiri political voice in occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the BJP government, continuing to suppress the Kashmiris' just struggle by banning pro-freedom parties in occupied Jammu and Kashmir, has now banned more organizations, including Jammu and

Kashmir Peoples League and Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Freedom League and also extended ban on Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front for another five years. The APHC-AJK Convener, Mehmood Ahmed Saghar, and other leaders, including Syed Ajtaz Rehman, Sheikh Muhammad Yaqoob, Altaf Ahmed Butt and Zahid Ashraf in their separate statements in Islamabad said ban on pro-freedom parties will not detach Kashmiri people from their righteous demand of right to self-determination.

They said the fresh attempt of the BJP-led Indian governments to further suppress Kashmiris by imposing ban on Hurriyat parties in IIOJK is another act of brazen terrorism in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Despite the relentless campaign of repression unleashed by the Indian government, the will of the Kashmiri people for freedom and self-determination cannot be suppressed.

The Indian government's strategy of killing, torturing, and banning political and pro-freedom parties has failed to silence the voice of freedom in Kashmir, they added. They urged the United Nations Human Rights Council and other rights organizations to take notice of Indian state terrorism in the territory.

Meanwhile, Chief Spokesman of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Muhammad Rafiq Dar in a statement in Islamabad, strongly condemning the extension of ban on Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front for another five years, termed it immoral, undemocratic and illegal.

He said that extension of ban on the most vibrant political party like JKLF means silencing people's most popular voice in Jammu Kashmir, adding India last time unlawfully banned JKLF in March 2019 and arrested its top leadership, including its Chairman Muhammad Yasin Malik in fake, farcical and politically motivated cases.

Plight of Women in Balochistan: A Disturbing Surge in Domestic Violence Cases

SIBI, BALOCHISTAN: Safia Bibi, a 30-year-old mother of three, battles scorching heat as she prepares chapatis outdoors. Despite her youth, Safia bears the weight of adversity, her worn face a testament to her struggles. Last year's devastating flood washed away her home in Gotla Sultan Kot, leaving her family homeless and financially strained. The resultant stress on her husband escalated into domestic violence, a grim reality for many women in the region.

Commission reports underscore the severity of the issue, with 157 reported cases in June 2022 alone, accompanied by distressing statistics of honor killings and sexual abuse. Women Suffer In Silence. Although legislative measures have been implemented, such as the 2021 law penalizing domestic violence, enforcement remains insufficient, as highlighted by Muhammad Zubair Makhdoom from the

Shifa Foundation in Naserabad. Women like Zahra in Pishin, Mariam in Naserabad, and Safiya in Quetta endure silent suffering behind closed doors, victims of abusive relationships. Dr. Shahida Batool emphasizes the multifaceted consequences of domestic violence, ranging from physical and psychological harm to broader social and economic implications.

The escalating trend is alarming, with a 30% increase in cases over the past decade. Despite the grim statistics, there is hope. Various groups are actively engaged in providing support and advocacy, aiming to create a safer environment for women and children in Balochistan. It's a challenging battle, but with collective effort, positive change is achievable.

27 Percent Increase in Violence Against Women

Director Alauddin Khilji of the Aurat Foundation in Quetta sheds light on the alarming increase in domestic violence in Balochistan, including physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Intiaz Manjho from the Sahar Organization in Naserabad notes a troubling 27% increase in such cases post-floods. Human Rights

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PESHAWAR: PESCO workers are busy repairing the transformer in the Ichsil area.

Death anniversary of "1965 War Hero" MM Alam on Monday

ISLAMABAD (INP): The 11th death anniversary of "1965 War Hero" Muhammad Mahmood Alam, popularly known as M M Alam will be observed on March 18, 2024 (Monday).

Pakistan Air Force (PAF) legendary war hero MM Alam's record of shooting down five Indian war planes in less than a minute remains unbeaten. Alam, nicknamed as "Little Dragon" popularly, while piloting an F-86 Sabre, shot down five Indian war planes in less than a minute during 1965 Pak-India war and altogether, downed nine war planes in the aerial

fight. MM Alam was the first ever fighter pilot for PAF. Listed on top in the hall of famers' list at the PAF Museum in Karachi, Alam is considered as a national hero for Pakistan, most significantly, for his remarkable show of brilliance in the war of 1965 he was awarded the "Sitara-e-Jurat" and also the BAR medal.

The war hero was born on July 6, 1935, in Calcutta, India and was the eldest of 11 siblings. No one in his family before him had been part of the military, and in fact, he joined the armed forces against his father's will. In 1965, when India started war in the late night, Alam who was the first commanding officer of the first squadron of Assaults Mirage III, took his F-86 Sabre jet plane equipped with AIM-9 sidewinder missiles and fly over the skies of Sargodha to defeat the enemies who entered in Pakistan Air Space.

Here, MM Alam made the unforgettable history by knocking down nine Indian Fighter Jets Hawker Hunters' in air to air combat despite Hawker Hunter superiority over F-86. He shot down as he sets an unbeaten world record by downing five Indian aircraft in thirty seconds. Alam announced to the radar controller that he had shot down nine IAF aircraft and when Radio Pakistan announced his brilliant, people of Pakistan started rising the slogans of "Allah o Akbar". The Air Force legend was battling illness since December 2012, and was admitted to Pakistan Naval Station Shifa Hospital in Karachi. After a protracted illness, Alam died in Karachi on March 18, 2013 at the age of 77. He retired in 1982 as an Air Commodore.

Agri sector contributes \$3 bln to national economy in 2023-24: PBF

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) has said that agriculture sector may contribute \$3 billion to our economy in the year 2023-24. However, subject to holistic approach of PM Shehbaz Sharif led government, it has potential to grow much more.

Addressing a workshop here on Saturday, Vice President PBF Jahan Ara Wattoo said that to achieve agriculture targets properly we have to control cartels in commodity markets if we want the crop sector may perform. The business leader clarified that the government created high hopes for cotton growers when it declared an indicative price of Rs8,500 per maund. It led to strong revival of crops and production doubled in a matter of one season. However, as soon as cotton started arriving in the market, the price crashed to Rs6,500 per maund, robbing farmers of their hard-earned money and the government of credibility.

He also viewed capitalists are manipulating political, economic and other systems in the country. Political parties

currently in the electoral arena are either not capable enough or don't have the will to challenge and break this vicious control suffocating the farming community. All the administrative set-up cannot ensure even the provision of fertilisers at the official rates. The compost-making companies and their dealership network works are usurping the subsidy and miming money by selling their products through the black market. The incumbent government put in place a simple foolproof system for the provision of two bags of urea and one bag of DAP per acre at subsidised rates to all farmers across the board?

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2.8m ration bags delivered under Ramadan package

LAHORE (INP): On the directives of the Chief Minister Punjab, the provincial government is striving to provide relief to people during the holy month of Ramadan as district authorities delivered more than 2.8 million ration bags to deserving families across the province under the Nigebhan Ramadan package.

These details emerged during a briefing by officials at a meeting chaired by Punjab Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman at the Civil Secretariat here on Saturday.

The meeting reviewed the provision of ration bags and price control measures. The administrative secretaries of industries, agriculture, Chairman PITB, DG Punjab Food Authority, DIG Special Branch and officers concerned attended the meeting while all divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners participated through video link.

Officials briefed the Chief

Secretary that 319,000 ration bags were provided to deserving people yesterday.

They said that imported onions were available at a price of Rs 95 per kg in the 10 agriculture fair price (AFP) shops established in Ramadan bazaars in Lahore, while the sale of imported onions in Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Sargodha and Gujranwala would start from today.

The chief secretary said that the delivery of ration bags at the doorsteps of deserving families was a big challenge, adding that the programme was being implemented in an organized and hassle-free manner, which is unprecedented.

Expressing satisfaction over the provision of ration bags delivery, the chief secretary praised the Lodhran Deputy Commissioner for achieving a 71 percent target in the provision of ration bags. He said that no compromise could

be made on the quality of ration being provided under the Ramadan package, and the Punjab Food Authority should continue checking the food items.

The chief secretary also issued instructions to suspend the relevant staff for the distribution of ration bags in clusters at certain places in Muzaffargarh and Bahawalpur.

He said that the number of price control magistrates had been increased for effective monitoring of prices as the implementation of price lists would give relief to consumers to a great extent. He directed Price Magistrates to remain active in the field and take strict action against overcharging.

The administrative secretaries of industries and agriculture gave a detailed briefing at the meeting. They said that 598 persons were arrested and 192 cases were registered for overcharging.



ISLAMABAD: Mr. Ikramullah, hailing from Qila Saifullah Balochistan, who is currently 9th class student at Lawrence College, called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. Mr. Ikramullah's house and school were damaged in 2022 floods. On instructions of the PM, he was facilitated to continue education.

Reducing interest rates to devalue rupee, raise inflation: Murtaza Mughal

ISLAMABAD (INP): President of Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW), Murtaza Mughal has said that demand of the business community to reduce the interest rate was unjustified, as it will weaken the rupee and trigger inflation.

In a statement issued on Sunday, he said an interest rate cut would allow the government to start unnecessary expenditures that are not required at this point.

Murtaza Mughal said that electricity and gas prices have troubled the entire country. People are going bankrupt while factories are closing down.

Many factories were running at half their production capacity, therefore, the demand to reduce the electricity and gas tariff was justified, but getting approval from the IMF will be impossible, he added.

The business leader said that increasing the tax net, bringing the non-tax-paying sectors into the tax net, and amending the NFC award have become necessary to save the country.

Restructuring of local and foreign debt has also become necessary. Still, caution is needed in

this regard so that it does not hurt the market, he cautioned.

Murtaza Mughal said the federal government is considering handing over the electricity distribution companies to the provinces. How will the provinces run these companies when the federal government cannot run them?

It would be better to sell these companies because the private sector would run them efficiently. He noted that bill-paying consumers have to bear the burden of loss-making discos, which is tantamount to encouraging corruption and power theft.

The people of the same area should also bear the burden of losses caused by electricity theft, and not the people of other areas should be punished for the crime they never committed, he said.

Dr. Mughal said climate change has become routine; therefore, the entire process must be reset to address the issue.

Regrettably, throughout the past two or three election cycles, successive governments have paid little more than lip service to climate change and developed a

coherent policy to mitigate its harmful effects.

The fact that provincial disaster management agencies are constantly behind the times despite having a full year and substantial funding to prepare for yearly rains is equally unacceptable.

When the civil machinery fails to clear roads and remove floodwater, as it does every time, the military is compelled to intervene and demonstrate the proper procedure.

We need an appropriate long-term and long-term plan, as Pakistan is among the top nations facing the most direct effects of climate change and global warming.

He said we need an appropriate short-term response mechanism for the annual rain overflow, adding that politicians must set aside their competing agendas and act in the nation's and its citizens' interests.

Everything that is occurring around us is completely expected. Unfortunately, none of it has gotten any attention because our political leaders have been too preoccupied with lust for power.



QUETTA: Member of Provincial Assembly Bakht Muhammad Kakar planting trees during the tree plantation campaign on the bypass.

PHMA pledges to join hands with govt for uplift of exports

LAHORE, March 16 (INP): Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers Association (PHMA) leadership has vowed that value-added textile industry would work closely with the new government with a view to enhance the exports and revive the growth momentum.

Zonal Chairman PHMA, Farrukh Iqbal asked the government to back the value-added apparel sector for its potential to harvest benefits of GSP Plus, providing mass employment to the jobless population of the country, as the exports to the EU countries have now starting to drop which is a matter of serious concern.

However, Farrukh Iqbal hailed the government's recent move to release Rs65 billion for payment of all verified pending refunds of exporters till previous month of 2024. This is a welcome move by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and we appreciate him along with his team, including Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan, as this move will definitely boost the confidence of exporters and encourage the export sector.

He also expressed the hope that the same spirit will be followed for payment of remaining refunds of sales tax deferred, DTD/DLT, ITUF and markup subsidy with a view to enhance ex-

ports. As the energy prices have been escalated to a record high, the PHMA leader maintained that constant hikes in gas and power rates would further stoke inflation, amidst high markup, making the Pakistani value-added textile products uncompetitive in the international market.

Farrukh Iqbal cautioned the government asking the move of increasing energy tariffs was unwise and would sabotage hard efforts of exporters to enhance Pakistan's exports in previous years. He asked the new governments to ensure a level-playing field by offering regionally competitive energy tariffs and continuing the Duty Drawback of Local Taxes and Levies scheme, as committed in the new five-year textile and apparel policy. He stressed that energy rates for industries should be brought at par or below the tariff prevailing in the competing regional countries.

He demanded a level-playing field with regional competitors through continuation of previous concessionary energy tariffs for the export industry.

Pointing out to the downward exports figure to the EU, he said that Pakistan's exports to European countries dipped year-on-year by 7.54 percent in the first seven months of the current fiscal year, mainly due to reduced demand for Pakistan goods in

western, southern and northern Europe.

The export proceeds from these countries fell to \$4.866 billion in July-January FY24, a drop from the \$5.263bn recorded in the corresponding months of the previous year, according to figures compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan, he added.

PHMA (NZ) senior vice chairman Amanullah Khan and vice chairman Khawaja Musharraf Iqbal observed that this decline in export proceeds indicated the challenges faced by Pakistan exporters in these economically uncertain times despite having preferential access to 27-member EU countries. According to the data, in FY23, exports to the EU dropped 4.41pc to \$8.188bn from \$8.566bn in the preceding fiscal year. However, the decline in exports was seen despite the Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) scheme.

The PHMA leadership said that GSP+ window had opened tremendous opportunities by way of inflow of abundant export orders which the industry would not be able to execute if liquidity problem of the industry is not resolved at the earliest. They stressed the need for adopting new technology so that Pakistan's exports may be able to cope with the emerging challenges in international arena.

Dollars' demand in market must remain balanced: Shahid Rasheed

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Sunday that the demand for dollars in the market should remain balanced.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, he said that a balanced exchange rate increases confidence in the market, which is very important.

Shahid Rasheed Butt said that maintaining the dollar's value was necessary to maintain the current balance between imports and exports. A change in the value of the dollar affects the import and export sector, which disturbs the business environment, he added.

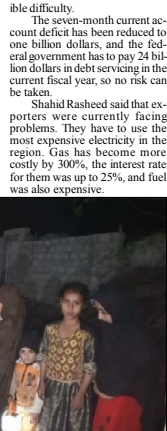
The business leader noted that the exporters get worried when the dollar becomes expensive. When the dollar becomes cheap, the imports start to increase, which causes the deficits to rise. Both these situations affect the business environment.

He said that the dollar's depreciation will increase the trade and current account deficit, which has been controlled with increased

difficultly.

The seven-month current account deficit has been reduced to one billion dollars, and the federal government has to pay 24 billion dollars in debt servicing in the current fiscal year, so no risk can be taken.

Shahid Rasheed said that exporters were currently facing problems. They have to use the most expensive electricity in the region. Gas has become more costly by 300%, the interest rate for them was up to 25%, and fuel was also expensive.



HARNAI: Former Caretaker Health Minister Dr. Ameer Muhammad Khan Jogezi distributing solar lights among the poor in the backward area of Harnai.

Aseefa Bhutto set to contest her first election from NA-207 Nawabshah

KARACHI (INP): Aseefa Bhutto-Zardari, the youngest offspring of President Asif Ali Zardari, is poised to enter the Political arena by contesting the upcoming by-election for the NA-207 Nawabshah constituency.

In the February 8 general elections, President Zardari had won the NA-207 Nawabshah seat. However, with his elevation to the office of the president, the seat became vacant, paving the way for Aseefa to step into the political spotlight with her maiden election.

Aseefa is set to reach Nawabshah tomorrow, where she will submit her nomination form for the by-election. This marks her debut in electoral politics, following in the footsteps of her family's political legacy.

Arrangements are underway for Aseefa's arrival at Nawabshah Airport, where she

will be greeted by supporters and party members. From there, she will proceed to Zardari House amidst a rally to demonstrate her commitment to serving the constituency. With her nomination, Aseefa aims to carry forward her family's legacy. As the by-election approaches, all eyes will be on her campaign as she seeks to secure the trust and support of voters in NA-207 Nawabshah.

After her father, Asif Ali Zardari, assumed office as the 14th president of Pakistan, Aseefa Bhutto-Zardari is set to assume the title of first lady. This development marks the second instance in the nation's 76-year history where a daughter or a sister of a head of state will be conferred with the title.

The designation of First Lady traditionally went to the spouse of a head of government or head of state, making

Aseefa Bhutto's likely appointment a rare occurrence after the 'King of Reconciliation', Asif Zardari, excelled in this matter as well.

However, during his first stint as president in 2008, the position of the first lady had been left vacant.

Asifa Bhutto's journey to the forefront of politics has been characterized by her unwavering support for her father and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Over the past decade, she has stood by Asif Zardari, lending her voice and commitment to furthering the party's political objectives.

The day Asif Ali Zardari was sworn to take the oath of office as the 14th president of the country, Aseefa arrived at the occasion by his side. The official account of the PPP on X had tweeted, "First lady with the President", sharing a picture of the two arriving for the oath ceremony.

Gwadar North Free Zone: Water supply project 60% complete

GWADAR (INP): A project to establish a water supply network in the Gwadar North Free Zone is nearly 60 percent complete. This significant development aims to address the immediate needs of companies eager to commence operations within the current year.

The project is divided into two parts. The first segment, being overseen by the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA), extends from the dams to the outer boundary of the Gwadar North Free Zone.

The second segment, soon to be initiated by the China Over-

seas Port Holding Company (COPHC), will run from the inner boundary wall of the Gwadar North Free Zone to the designated areas for factories.

Following a competitive bidding process, GPA awarded the contract to Sakoh Techno Company. This company is in the process of installing water pipelines from two primary sources: dam water, including from the Sawa and Shadi Kor dams, and a newly constructed, Chinese-funded 1.2 MGD desalination water plant.

A GPA official told Gwadar

Pro that the cost of laying the water supply network from both dams to the boundary of the Gwadar North Free Zone is Rs 110 million, with an estimated completion date in the first week of May.

Chairman of GPA, Passand Khan Bulendi, has played a crucial role in securing approval for water and power projects within the government's 2023-24 budget.

In addition to the water supply project, GPA has also approved funding for electricity supply from the Deep Sea Port Grid Station to the North Free Zone.



QUETTA: People are buying children's clothes from the roadside vendors at Joint Road.